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DISCOURSES

ON ALL THE

PRINCIPAL BRANCHES

OF

NATURAL RELIGION

AND

SOCIAL VIRTUE.

By *JAMES FOSTER*, D. D.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

Printed for the AUTHOR: And ſold by

Mr. NOON in *Cheapſide*; Meſſieurs J. and P. KNAPTON in *Ludgate-ſtreet*; Mr. MILLAR in the *Strand*; Mr. WHITRIDGE near the *Royal Exchange*; and Mr. DODSLEY in *Pall-Mall:* and by Mr. KINCAID and Meſſieurs HAMILTON and BALFOUR in *Edinburgh*; Mr. BARRY and Meſſieurs FOWLIS in *Glaſgow*; Mr. SMITH in *Dublin*; and other Bookſellers in *Great Britain* and *Ireland*. 1749.

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To the RIGHT HONOURABLE

HUGH, Lord *Willoughby* of *Parham.*

My Lord,

I HAVE desired your Lordship's leave, to inscribe the following discourses to your name, to testify my high sense of that friendship, with which you have been pleased to honour me; and my particular esteem of your distinguished character and merit.----And, in this last, I have the pleasure to concur with

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with many of the greateſt perſonages and beſt judges of true worth, throughout the whole kingdom.

YOUR Lordſhip, I know, will not expect any flattery in this addreſs----you would rather deteſt and ſcorn it---My own profeſſion diſclaims it---nor does the ſubject, in the leaſt, require it.

I HAVE always looked upon laviſh compliments, and high panegyrics, beſtowed on men of undeſerving or bad characters, not only as debaſing the writer, but as the moſt pointed and cruel ſatire, that could be offered to the Patron: Who thereby appears, to the conſiderate and virtuous, more worthleſs at leaſt, if not quite deſpicable: But to pay the due honours to exalted and amiable qualities of mind, and to great talents in high ſtations, ultimately devoted to the public good; this is but a juſt tribute of praiſe, which both reaſon and ingenuity dictate, and religion muſt approve.

IN this light then, *My Lord*, and in this alone, I hold myſelf to be excuſeable, in taking notice, even in a direct addreſs to your Lordſhip---of your fine

underſtanding; the ſagacity, penetration, and correctneſs of your judgment; your extenſive compaſs of knowledge; your taſte for philoſophical enquiries, and cultivation of the liberal ſciences; your early acquaintance with the hiſtories of antient and modern times; your uncommon ſkill, for your years, in the conſtitution and laws of your own country, and thoſe of other kingdoms and ſtates of *Europe*; eſpecially ſuch, as *Great Britain* is more frequently and cloſely connected with---and, to riſe above all this, your ſocial ſpirit; your love of juſtice; your calmneſs of temper, and expanded benevolence; your uncorrupted and inflexible zeal for civil and religious liberty; and, which it becomes me as a divine, more particularly to mention---your profeſſed regard to the great principles of religion, and known zeal for the ſacred ties of virtue and ſocial morality, in an age of vanity and trifles; when religion (to ſay the beſt) does not ſeem to be made much the *ſtudy*, or *concern*, of the great, even where it is not publicly inſulted and ridiculed.

Permit me to add, *My Lord*, that it is great pity, when at any time, an ingenuous modeſty, carried perhaps

haps to ſome extreme, but without affectation, deprives the public of the knowledge, and juſt influence, of other parts of a worthy and uſeful character. ----And, therefore, I cannot but heartily wiſh, that your Lordſhip's eminent abilities, and uncommon virtues (hitherto too induſtriouſly concealed through ſelf-diffidence, a reliſh for the pleaſures of private friendſhip, and the love of a ſtudious retirement) may ſoon appear in a more conſpicuous light, to the honour, and in the ſervice, of your country.

I am,

My Lord,

With very great and

unfeigned reſpect,

Your Lordſhip's moſt humble

and moſt obedient ſervant,

James Foſter.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

READER.

THE Author having been hindered by ill health, and frequent returns of his diſorder, from publiſhing this firſt volume at the time prefixed, will not much longer detain the reader, from the peruſal of the work itſelf; eſpecially, as there is ſo large an introduction to it, containing every thing of real importance, as renders a formal preface unneceſſary. And he has no apology to offer, for treating on ſubjects, that have been ſo often handled by very judicious and celebrated writers, with great exactneſs of ſentiment, and ſtrength of reaſon, but this—— that the ſubjects themſelves are, confeſſedly, of the higheſt moment and uſe, and can never be thoroughly exhauſted; that the ſetting them, in the greateſt variety of lights, is the method beſt calculated to convince every underſtanding, and ſtrike every temper; that ſome things, perhaps, will be found, that are not ſo common in writings of this kind, or are illuſtrated in a new and peculiar manner; and that one chief view, throughout the whole, has been, to render both the principles, and proofs, of natural religion, which equally concern all without diſtinction, fully intelligible to all——by omitting, as

much as is poſſible, all philoſophical and ſcholaſtic terms, and reducing, more involved and abſtruſe demonſtrations, to a plainer form.

The Author makes his moſt grateful acknowledgments to the public, for the encouragement they have been pleaſed to give to this work; and has nothing farther to add, but that, partly through the uncertain ſtate of his health, and his long indiſpoſitions, and partly by the advice of ſome of his friends, whoſe judgment he highly values, he has been induced to defer, the publication of the devotional parts, to the concluſion of the Second volume; that they may be enlarged beyond his firſt ſcheme, and may be adapted to the chief branches of benevolence and ſocial goodneſs, as well as to the firſt principles of religion and piety. And this, it is hoped, will render them of more extenſive uſe to all readers; for whoſe ſervice, in their higheſt and moſt important intereſts, the whole was originally compoſed, and is now moſt affectionately and ſincerely intended.

INTRO-

THE

INTRODUCTION.

IT is generally allowed to be the peculiar felicity and glory of mankind, that they are *capable* of the *knowledge* of GOD: a knowledge, that is the moſt grand and enlarging, the moſt ſublime and ennobling, the moſt delightful and tranſporting, the moſt inſtructive and improving of all others; ſince the *object* of it is the center of all perfection, and the ſource of all good. It is *this*, that ſets us at the head of the viſible creation, and by which we are chiefly diſtinguiſhed from the inferior orders of living creatures: there being *no one faculty*, in the world which we now inhabit, beſides the *human underſtanding*, that is adapted, and by its tranſcendent excellence and ſingular capacities devoted, and, as it were, *conſecrated* to this moſt exalted and uſeful knowledge.

ALL *other* beings are ſupported by the energy of GOD's omnipotent arm, enlivened by his invigorating preſence, and continually refreſhed by the overflowings of his goodneſs: but through the imperfection of their make, and the want of an intellectual prin-

ciple within, can neither *diſcern* the power which upholds, the preſence which animates, nor the kind and gracious influence that chears and comforts their frame. And as this proceeds from an incurable defect in their original conſtitution, they are *innocent*, though comparatively *unhappy*.

But when *the ſpirit of man*, which is *the candle of the* Lord, inſtead of directing to him, and terminating its views in him, is alienated from his ſervice and honour; when through inattention, or the infatuations of vice, it diſcovers not him, from whom it derives all its powers of illuminating the ſoul, and guiding it to true happineſs; when beings who are particularly fitted, and muſt be allowed, therefore, to have been formed on purpoſe, for a ſerious ſearch and diſquiſition after *Deity*, ſeldom, or never, aſk themſelves this queſtion—*Where is* God *our maker?* how may he be known, and more completely known? in what manner ſerved, his favour ſecured, and his benefits acknowledged with an affectionate and reverent gratitude?—this is not only ſpurning at ingenuity, and at all decency of character, but an offence againſt our peculiar make, and giving up the moſt eminent prerogatives and advantages of it.

And as from its implanted capacity of finding out God the ſovereign univerſal ſpirit, the moſt glorious and amiable object of knowledge, ſprings principally the ſuperior *dignity* of human nature, ſo likewiſe its moſt elevated and refined *pleaſures*, and ſureſt *conſolations*—pleaſures, that, at the ſame time they *fill* the ſoul, purify it, remove it at a greater diſtance from the animal world beneath, and raiſe it to a nearer affinity to thoſe more perfect ſpirits, who, in the rank of nature, are placed above it; and both extend its deſires after, and qualify it for, ſtill greater and more divine pleaſures—and conſolations, more *independent* than any other, on the oppreſſions of power, the malice and violence of

enemies, and the external caſualties of life; which, while the ſubject is *fitly diſpoſed* to receive them, and GOD *exiſts* (from the contemplation of whoſe boundleſs mercy and watchful providence they chiefly flow), can never fail. Every *other* ſpring of comfort, without this, would be frequently retrenched, if not quite obſtructed, in its courſe, and able to yield, at beſt, but a ſuperficial, precarious, fleeting ſatisfaction. And whenever theſe *vain* objects of our confidence and hope are taken from us, theſe *inſufficient* foundations and pillars of our felicity (which we all know may ſoon happen, through innumerable unexpected events, againſt which, it is not in all the united force of nature to furniſh out a ſuitable defence), when, I ſay, this misfortune befals us—if we have no *reſource* of hope in a common father of our ſpirits, who alone can repair our loſſes, and train us up to a happineſs becoming our nature and its nobleſt powers of enjoyment, we ſhall, of courſe, be abandoned to the extremity of our ſorrows, and to, the moſt dreadful and intolerable of all human agonies, deſpair.

ADD to all this, that where the exiſtence of a *Deity* is not acknowledged, univerſal error, in points of the utmoſt moment with reſpect to the improvement, exaltation, and happineſs of man, muſt overſpread the mind, as well as darkneſs and horror the face of nature. If we *know not* GOD, and yet GOD *really exiſts*, the former, the preſerver, the governour of the univerſal ſyſtem of beings, it is impoſſible we ſhould *know ourſelves*, or the true deſign of the *human conſtitution*.—It is impoſſible we ſhould know *our duty*, while we are ignorant that we are the creatures of GOD, his frail neceſſary dependents, and conſtant beneficiaries; from whence, our firſt and moſt important *obligations* ſpring.—It is impoſſible we ſhould have ſuch worthy and vigorous motives to the ſacred offices of *benevolence* and *common friendſhip*, while we are unacquainted with this fundamental truth, 'that mankind are conſti-

'tuted one *whole*, one great community, by a wiſe all-diſpoſing 'mind, and endowed by him with generous affections, and in-'ſtincts of mutual ſympathy, jointly to purſue one ultimate *end*, 'the univerſal good.'

NAY, farther, with an underſtanding ſo depreſſed, and perverted from the knowledge of eſſential truths, we cannot poſſibly form a right idea and apprehenſion of the beneficial, harmonious, and regular ſeries, nor of the final uſes, to which the ſeemingly various, but correſponding, parts are all ſubſervient, in the diſpoſition and order of nature. But, on the contrary, there muſt be ſtrange and ſurpriſing abſurdities, in the very firſt principles of all our religious and moral reaſonings: ſuch as—*effects*, and an *infinite progreſs* and *ſucceſſion* of effects, without a *cauſe*; which may, therefore, inſtantly ceaſe to be, and ſink into utter annihilation, without a cauſe, *i. e.* to aggravate and multiply the abſurdity may have *no reaſon* at all either for their *being*, or *not being*.—Again, a vaſt and inſeparably united *ſociety* of rational beings, without government, without law, without order—almoſt infinite variety, reſulting from the fixed, inflexible, and uniformly operating laws of neceſſity—and, in the minuteſt things, exquiſite *deſign*, and *ſkill* of *operation*, manifeſted, where there was no underſtanding to direct, nor power to execute. Theſe are ſuch flagrant and egregious follies, that for a man to bring himſelf not to be ſtartled at them, muſt argue his faculties, of inveſtigating truth, to be much upon the decline. But to be a profeſſed believer of, and a zealous advocate for, ſuch extravagancies as theſe, ſhews a wantonneſs of believing, which ſcruples things *probable*, but readily ſwallows *impoſſibilities*; and has therefore not barely obſcured, but put out, reaſon's light.

BUT there is another topic of great importance, which deſerves to be particularly conſidered, and that is, the ill influence which *atheiſm* muſt, of neceſſity, have upon univerſal virtue and morality;

lity; and the great ſtrength and ſupport, that will be derived to all the human and ſocial virtues, from the *belief* and *acknowledgement* of a ſupreme governor of the world. The ſubſtance, of what is neceſſary to be offered on this head, will be comprehended in the following propoſitions.

First, Though it be allowed, that various ſtrong motives, to the cultivation and purſuit of virtue, ariſe from the *abſtract nature* and *idea* of virtue itſelf, independent of any *poſitive* law or conſtitution whatever, yet, even *theſe* are much ſtronger upon the *acknowledgement* of a *Deity*, than they can poſſibly be on any ſcheme of *atheiſm*. The fitneſs of the thing, in general, will indeed ſubſiſt under both ſuppoſitions; being ſtrictly immutable in itſelf. The general rules and ties of juſtice will, for inſtance, and muſt, be always the ſame. But when we deſcend to particular acts of juſtice, that are proper to a certain order of beings, and ſuited to a peculiar ſituation, and to ſpecial occaſions and circumſtances, HERE will be found to be a wide, and very remarkable, difference. For the firm believer, and pious worſhipper, of an all-wiſe and moſt gracious being, who has contrived and fixed the ſeveral occurrences and relations of human life in the moſt perfect manner, ſuch a one, I ſay, will readily ſubmit to conſtitutions of equity, that cannot be complied with without private inconvenience, and offering violence to ſtrong paſſions; from a perſuaſion of their *neceſſity* and *uſe* upon the whole. Whereas an *atheiſt*, though he ſtill retains a general ſenſe of the diſtinction of juſt and unjuſt, may think a particular ſcheme of things to be hard and oppreſſive; and when this is the caſe, he muſt look upon all rules and meaſures of juſtice that ſpring from this particular ſcheme (whatever it be), as a *ſlave* does on his *chains*, with reluctance and diſcontent. *Fate* and *chance*, the idols which he ſubſtitutes in the place of God, can, with him, be names of no ſuch eſtimation, as to

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check or moderate his cenſure. And while he thinks *any ſtate* of the world *wrong*, and the *rules* of *moral behaviour*, that naturally ariſe from it, to be of conſequence *wrong*, he can have no reſtraints, but ſelf-intereſt and the fear of civil puniſhments, to prevent his breaking through ſuch, ſuppoſed, unreaſonable obſtacles to the full gratification of his deſires. If he thinks, for example, that the condition of *mankind* is irregularly and unfitly ſettled (and what ſhould hinder him from entertaining ſuch an apprehenſion, who acknowledges no deſign either of wiſdom, or goodneſs, in any parts of the univerſe); all thoſe *human virtues* which are adapted to that condition, and reſult merely from it, whether they are human offices of juſtice, beneficence, or temperance, 'muſt 'at leaſt loſe a conſiderable part of their weight and influence; if 'they can retain in the mind of one, that argues at this licentious 'rate, any weight or influence at all.'

AGAIN, our idea of the intrinſic excellence and beauty of virtue will be more clear and elevated, and calculated to make a deeper impreſſion, upon the ſuppoſition that GOD *exiſts*, than it can poſſibly do, on admitting the *contrary* principle. For if a being of infinite wiſdom, and unchangeable rectitude of nature, has planted in man this inward univerſal *ſenſe* of moral beauty, the neceſſary inference from hence is, that it muſt be a *right ſenſe*. It cannot be imagined, that they entertain this idea from a determinate, and by them unalterable, conſtitution of mind, but becauſe it was *wiſeſt* and *beſt* upon the whole, that they ſhould have *this* conſtitution, and *no other*. But this can never be the *atheiſts* plea. *Any* other ſenſe, nay the directly *oppoſite* ſenſe, of lovelineſs and honour in vice, and of horror and turpitude in virtue, might have been equally right, if it had happened to be the real inherent ſentiment of the human mind. And, conſequently, there muſt, upon this ſcheme, 'be a ſtrong temptation, to the viciouſly

'diſpoſed,

'diſpoſed, to endeavour to over-rule and extirpate the *moral ſenſe* 'now actually ſubſiſting, as arbitrary and in its own nature mu-'table, to the utter deformation of the moral world, and ſubver-'ſion of all ſocieties.'

BUT, SECONDLY, as it appears, that the acknowledgment of a ſupreme being, poſſeſſed of infinite wiſdom and unlimited goodneſs, ſtrengthens *every argument* that can be ſuggeſted from the abſtract *natures* of virtue and vice, and their reſpective *tendencies* to happineſs or miſery; it is equally undeniable, that it enforces the practice of morality, and of all the ſocial offices of benevolence, fidelity, temperance, and honour, by *new motives* which *atheiſm* quite annihilates; though they are highly reaſonable, adapted to a ſenſe of ingenuity, and have the utmoſt influence that moral motives are capable of—ſuch are, chiefly, *gratitude* to the author of our nature and its diſtinguiſhed powers, which we can never expreſs but by acting a wiſe and virtuous part, agreeable to the original deſign of its formation; and an awful *reverence* of the almighty, omniſcient, and inflexibly juſt governor and judge of mankind, by whoſe ſentence, the fate of their whole being muſt be irreverſibly decided. To aſſert, that theſe are not *motives*, and moſt *forcible motives* too, to a right and good conduct, is an extravagance that none, who have the leaſt tolerable acquaintance with human nature and its moſt *efficacious* principles of action, can be guilty of; to deny that *atheiſm* quite *deſtroys* theſe motives, is ſelf-evidently abſurd: the concluſion, therefore, ſprings up of itſelf, and without employing any labour or ſkill in deducing it, *viz.* 'that religion *enforces* in the moſt effectual manner, and be-'yond all rate of compariſon, every law and duty of morality.'

LET it be further conſidered, in the THIRD place, that the generality of mankind are much more likely to be influenced by the awe of a ſupreme authority, than by any refined ideas of beauty

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and order, or ſpeculative reaſonings about the eternal difference of good and evil: or, in other words, virtue comes more powerfully recommended, to them, under the notion of a *law* by which they ſhall be judged, than merely as a ſcheme of *moral perfection*, and a rule of *right*. So that if the *atheiſtic* ſcheme, of pretended reformation, could ſo far prevail, as to leave the bulk of the world without all ſenſe of the ſuperintendency and government of GOD, morality would infallibly decline, and vice ſpread itſelf and triumph, with unuſual inſolence and exceſs. Whereas, though the common people may ſet out at firſt on a principle, which, I own, is not the moſt generous, *viz.* 'the fear and dread of an over-ruling 'power;' yet, if the authority of GOD makes ſuch an impreſſion upon their minds, that they become innured and ſeaſoned to the *practice* of virtue, they can ſcarce fail in the end, from an intimate acquaintance with it and the force of habit, of acquiring an inward *eſteem* and *love* of it for its eſſential goodneſs; and a *deteſtation* of vice for its native horror and malignity.

FROM the three foregoing propoſitions, which, I hope, have been ſufficiently explained and proved, the following *corollaries* directly follow:—'That the *atheiſt* cannot have ſuch *powerful mo-* 'tives, to hold the life of his neighbour ſacred, or maintain the 'honour of his bed inviolate, as he who *believes* the exiſtence, 'and moral government, of a ſupreme infinite *Deity*—That, by 'neceſſary conſequence, he cannot give *equal ſecurity* for his 'behaving with honour, fidelity, and juſtice—That he ought to 'be more *narrowly watched*, not only as to *leſſer* inſtances of ini- 'quity, but with reſpect to crimes of the *blackeſt* and moſt *atro-* 'cious guilt—And therefore, as the ſum of all, that *religion* is 'moſt certainly a ſtrength and ſupport to *virtue*, and *atheiſm*, 'comparatively at leaſt, an *immoral* ſcheme.'

I SAY

I SAY *comparatively*, becauſe I am not fully perſuaded, that immorality, eſpecially of the groſſer ſort, muſt always be the *neceſſary conſequence*. A ſtrong ſenſe of the infamy of ſome vices, conſtitutional benevolence and moderation, a regard to outward decency and public laws, and even ſelf-love and the fear of retaliation may unite their forces, to reſtrain from all notorious and hurtful inſtances of licentiouſneſs. To which may be added, upon the whole, that particular examples of moral or immoral behaviour do not always exactly correſpond with opinions and ſpeculative principles, but are occaſioned by a variety of other circumſtances of a quite foreign and independent nature.

ALL this the gay licentious will be apt, in the overflowings of their impertinence and ſtupidity, to cenſure as formal preciſe enthuſiaſm. And I am very willing to allow, that they have equal reaſon for their exclamations on this head, as for moſt other branches of their infidelity and libertiniſm. From levity of mind, and want of thought, the whole, in common, ſprings. By the *fool*, that imagines in his heart *there is no God*, the moſt ſerious and ſacred laws of nature are eaſily, and without remorſe, blaſphemed. But though ſuch perſons are, in fact, *irrational*, this misfortune attends them above their fellows of the ſame denomination, that they are ſtill *accountable*. To others, who are of a more docile and ingenuous temper of mind, I would ſtrongly recommend the conſideration of the ſhort ſketch, above given, of thoſe confuſions and miſchiefs to all ſcience, and all the principles of morality, that muſt unavoidably enſue, if there be no really exiſting, intelligent, and living GOD of the univerſe.

BUT, here, it is neceſſary to be obſerved, that theſe evils will *only* follow, in their full extent, upon annihilating the *true* GOD, the GOD of nature; whoſe exiſtence right reaſon diſcovers, and the univerſal frame of things demonſtrates; and not thoſe *fictitious*

tious and *chimerical* beings, which ignorance, ſuperſtition, and worldly policy have introduced, and preſumptuouſly thruſt into his throne of ſovereign empire. For if the almighty principle, which uncontroulably regulates all the events of the world, was intirely blind and arbitrary, who could *eſteem* it! who could *love* it! what rational being, that had the faculty of tracing, though in an imperfect degree, the natural and obvious conſequences of things, could feel any ſentiment, but what was *averſive* and *terrible* at the contemplation of it! what good being but muſt *hate* it! and be in all its diſpoſitions, all its ſchemes and wiſhes, utterly *repugnant* to it! who could have a probability of *pleaſing* ſuch an enormous and tremendous being! or who, on the contrary, could be ſure of *offending* him! And yet *every* creature, however honeſt and exact his behaviour were, might be *afraid* of offending him. So that if this was the *true ſtate* of the caſe, there could be *no* efficacious motive to virtue, any more than upon the principle of abſolute *atheiſm:* nothing could remain, but abſolute uncertainty of happineſs, anxious ſuſpenſe and diſtraction of thought, and apprehenſions full of terror, which would be diffuſed throughout the whole moral world. And in this *diſtreſsful* ſituation indeed, if it were a *poſſible* ſituation, many of the moſt judicious, and of the beſt, part of human kind might be inclined to prefer *atheiſm itſelf* to ſuch an *unnatural*, ſuch a *malignant Deity*. For *no* God at all can unqueſtionably do *no* wrong, nor be, in the leaſt degree, the cauſe or inſtrument of miſery; but a *capricious* Deity cannot certainly be depended upon for any good, and even the exertions of his goodneſs may, upon the whole, be unfriendly and ruinous.

However, though we allow that, if this was the really exiſting Deity, *atheiſm* would be a *preferable*, or, at leaſt, an *equal* ſcheme, it might, notwithſtanding, be a very unhappy and miſerable ſcheme; leſs unhappy indeed than *another*, but extremely

miſerable in *itſelf*. For though the abſence of a *falſe* GOD might be no hurt, or injury at all, to the creation; yet the want of *the true* would be an inconceivable calamity, and rationally portend univerſal deſtruction. It may be a *privilege*, not to be ſubject to a power that is able to oppreſs, and inclined to oppreſs; but at the ſame time it muſt be a moſt *deſirable ingredient* in all limited and dependent happineſs to be under the regulation, and ultimately at the diſpoſal, of unerring wiſdom and ſupreme neceſſary goodneſs. And the *miſchiefs* of loſing ſuch a vital principle, ſuch a ſovereign head, ſuch a father of rational beings, ſuch a director and governor of all nature, muſt be *felt* by the whole univerſe. And if there be a *poſſibility* of exiſting after death, without the belief and acknowledgement of a Deity (which the *atheiſt*, upon his own principles whether of fate or chance, muſt be obliged, I think, to admit), what a ſcene of diſtraction and horror does this open, and lay before us?—An infinity of uncertain, fluctuating, interrupted happineſs at the beſt; but perhaps an almoſt uninterrupted ſeries of everlaſting calamities. For chance may always be againſt us; and neceſſity, without mind and providence, may, upon the whole, be neceſſary infelicity. All mankind therefore, by this ſcheme, are rendered uneaſy about the preſent, and anxious as to the future, ſtate of their exiſtence: good men are diſcouraged and oppreſſed, in their efforts and enterprizes of virtue; and even wicked men are in very diſconſolate circumſtances; as, unleſs the exiſtence of a *Deity* be ſuppoſed and acknowledged, they want ſome of the moſt powerful motives, that the univerſal ſcope of nature affords, to reform their evil courſes, and, thereby, to aſſert and reclaim the honour of their moral faculties, and purſue the greateſt and moſt important happineſs of their whole being. To be cut off from the poſſibility of obtaining enjoyments of pleaſure, pure and immortal, by a ſincere repentance, is what very few, of the corrupt and de-

generate part of mankind, would wiſh to be their determined and inevitable portion. For they generally ſin, with a hope of ſecuring the gratifications of both worlds; and, therefore, the *truth* of the *atheiſtic* ſcheme ſhould even, by them, be eſteemed a dreadful *misfortune* to themſelves, as well as to the world in general; ſince it cuts them off from the aſſured expectation of any ſatisfactions, but what are confined within the narrow limit, and ſcanty term, of mortality. Some few of the moſt depraved may, perhaps, bring themſelves to *acquieſce* in this; but they cannot ſurely *wiſh* for it, becauſe human nature ſhudders at the thought.

I SHALL conclude theſe introductory obſervations, as I am naturally led to do by the immediately preceding reflexions, with making a brief compariſon between *ſuperſtition* and *atheiſm*.

ATHEISM, and ſuperſtition, are the two *oppoſite extremes* of error. But mankind, confuſed in thought and blinded by their paſſions, are too apt to overlook the middle path, where truth, and right, and ſafety lie, and center in one, or other, of theſe dangerous exceſſes. When they have a notion of any thing as highly abſurd and injurious, they ſeem bewildered, and know not where to ſtop; and the force of their prejudices puſhes them on to an equal extreme. In order to keep, at the utmoſt poſſible, diſtance from error, they fly likewiſe from the truth.

AND hence it ariſes, that the *ſuperſtitious* part of the world have ever been forward to exclaim againſt every attempt, to expoſe their trifles and follies, and reſtore religion to its original rectitude—as impiety, blaſphemy, and, at leaſt, implicit atheiſm: whereas the *atheiſt* on the other hand, upon the frightful ſtories he has heard, or the ill conſequences he has ſeen, of ſuperſtition (and being altogether as ſuperficial in his inquiries), has thought theſe a ſufficient warrant to decry all religion as ſuperſtition. Add to this, 'that '*ſuperſtition* has generally appeared more open, and barefaced, 'than

'than *atheiſm*, and the pernicious effects of it have been more *ſen-*
'*ſible*, and more frequently *experienced*; becauſe *ſuperſtition has*
'*been* cloathed with power, and propagated and ſupported by the
'ſecular arm: but *atheiſm* never *was*, and indeed never *can* be,
'without viſibly looſening the baſis of ſociety, and ſhaking the
'pillars of government. Were this privilege *once* allowed it, we
'might quickly *ſee*, that it was the natural ſpring of cruelty, re-
'lentleſs oppreſſion, and inflexible tyranny in princes; and of riot,
'and confuſion, among all ranks of ſubjects; and, in ſhort, that
'intereſt, and a probable ſecurity from the reſentment of injuries
'or from penal laws, were the only bounds ſet to its diſorders.
''Tis *only*, becauſe *atheiſm* has never been publicly protected and
'honoured, and, of conſequence, never had an opportunity of diſ-
'playing itſelf in its full intrinſic malignity, that any alleviating
'things have been ſaid of it. For this reaſon *it* has been entirely
'ſpared, or but ſlightly and gently cenſured; while *ſuperſtition*, be-
'ing rendered the more remarkable by having full ſcope in which
'to exert itſelf, has been the ſtanding topic of reproach and ridi-
'cule.'

And becauſe it ſeems to be a prevailing notion, that ſuperſtition is in its conſequences much *worſe* than atheiſm; by which the latter is ſoftened and palliated, and ſome encouragement, I apprehend, is given to atheiſtic opinions, and to that wild licentiouſneſs and corruption of manners which they have a direct tendency to introduce; I ſhall endeavour to ſtate this matter fairly and impartially: being fully perſuaded, that the reſult of the whole will be this, that whatever may be thought of *ſuperſtition* (for which I am far from being an advocate), *atheiſm* will be condemned, as a monſter, by all who retain the common principles of reaſon, or a juſt concern for the honour of human nature, for public order, and the happineſs of the world.

But

BUT before I enter directly upon this argument, I ſhall premiſe a ſhort account of the two different ſubjects, to which the argument relates.

OF *atheiſm* in the ſtrict ſenſe of it, as it denotes a direct and formal denial of the exiſtence of the Deity, there are two principal kinds. But there are ſome other opinions, which, if in their natural conſequences they do not terminate, at laſt, in naked and undiſguiſed atheiſm, are exactly the ſame with reſpect to their influence on morality, and the public welfare of mankind: and therefore I ſhall take the liberty to range *both* theſe under *one* claſs; the particulars of which are as follow.

FIRST, To the head of *groſs* atheiſm belongs the doctrine of abſolute and univerſal *fate*; which ſuppoſes the world to be an eternal ſelf-exiſtent ſyſtem, in which all things come to paſs neceſſarily, without any intelligent firſt cauſe, any ſupreme deſigning mind to preſide over nature, and maintain and regulate its influences.

OR, *ſecondly*, the *contrary* ſcheme (for atheiſm, notwithſtanding its pretence to a more refined philoſophy, is inconſiſtent, and at variance, with itſelf), I ſay, the *contrary* ſcheme, which aſcribes the origin and formation of the univerſe to no cauſe at all, whether mechanical or intellectual, or, which amounts to juſt the ſame, to a fleeting, blind, random, and unguided *chance*.

As to the more *indirect* kinds of atheiſm, their natural effects, as was hinted above, muſt be the ſame with thoſe of *profeſſed* atheiſm itſelf: of them the chief, to which all the reſt may be eaſily reduced, are, the *denial of a providence*; of an infinite and active ſpirit animating and upholding the frame of the world; and of a wiſe *moral government*, preſcribing laws to rational beings, and taking an account of their conduct: and, laſtly, the *Manichean* doctrine, that has divided the creation of the univerſe, and the regulation

lation and diſpoſal of all things in it, between *two* principles, abſolutely independent and equal in knowledge and power; the one ſupremely and unchangeably good, and the other eſſentially malicious and evil. With reſpect to this doctrine, it is moſt evident, that it introduces, into the immenſe univerſe, a ſtate of utter anarchy and confuſion; that it makes exactly the proportions of good and evil, which *now* ſubſiſt, to be *neceſſary*, and *no* other *poſſible*; ſo that in a manner it coincides with the atheiſtic notion of *fate:* and becauſe the ſuppoſition of two co-ordinate powers, acted by different diſpoſitions and purſuing different views, is inconſiſtent with the very idea of a *moral rule*, conducted by ſettled and eſtabliſhed laws, it muſt, upon this account likewiſe, amount to the ſame, at leaſt with reſpect to the conſequences reſulting from it, as the utter *denial* of a *providence:* and the denial of a providence cannot fail to have the ſame effect, upon the conduct and ſtate of mankind, public and private, with direct and avowed *atheiſm*.

And now having finiſhed what I intended to offer, in a preliminary way, upon this head, let me add to it a brief deſcription of *ſuperſtition*; both to give the whole ſubject its due latitude, and repreſent it in a clearer light. Superſtition has always its foundation, in diſhonourable and unworthy notions of God. It either ſuppoſes him to be a weak being, pleaſed with trifles, and offended with trifles, and, conſequently, as one, whom a rational underſtanding can never, ſtrictly ſpeaking, reverence; or as a tremendous, vindictive, inexorable being, whom the mind muſt always contemplate with horror. And this it is, which gives ſuperſtition its different *turn*, either to levity, or gloom. It opens the way for fancy, or fear, or a weak underſtanding, to make infinite excurſions, and dreſs it up in that vaſt variety of forms, in which it has hitherto appeared to the world. '*Superſtition* never is, nor

'can

'can be, *uniform*; and therefore the *ill* conſequences of it, what-
'ever they may be, cannot be fixed by any ſtated invariable laws,
'nor, conſequently, *always the ſame*. It may occaſion the greateſt
'miſchiefs, in ſome caſes; and have but very few injurious effects
'in others; or, perhaps, none at all, that reach beyond the un-
'happy, deluded, and diſtempered perſon himſelf. It may be
'ſprightly and auſtere, but in different proportions of each; it
'may be mild, or raging; good-natured, or perſecuting; immo-
'ral, or of no perceivable prejudice to the cauſe of virtue; ac-
'cording to the nature of its particular taint, and the complexion
'and temper of the ſuperſtitious.' And upon this ſhort account of it, ſufficient for my preſent purpoſe, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that the ſpread, or progreſs, of atheiſtic principles is likely to be attended with, at leaſt, *equal* bad conſequences upon the whole, and, in particular inſtances, with *worſe*, than even ſuperſtition itſelf. And,

First, The chief miſchief of *ſuperſtition*, which has been ſo loudly complained of in all ages, is, 'that it frequently interferes with
'the moſt ſacred and eſſential branches of moral goodneſs, and ſup-
'plants the immutable obligations of virtue.' It is allowed: but is not *this* likewiſe the immediate and natural tendency of *atheiſm*? Is that a ſcheme, in the leaſt, calculated for the preſervation and maintenance of morality? Is it, in any degree, friendly to ſobriety, temperance, and the ſocial virtues? Does it afford one ſingle principle, on which to raiſe and cultivate an exalted public uſefulneſs, or a generous concern for the welfare of mankind? An atheiſt, let him ſay what he will, muſt feel the contrary: and though he may retain a general ſenſe of juſtice, and experience ſenſible impreſſions and movings of humanity, yet he will find, upon reflection, that this is entirely owing to a benignity of natural temper, confirmed perhaps by education and habit; which *conſtitutional* goodneſs, his

his principles, instead of being adapted to *cherish* and *improve*, must tend, rather, to *weaken* and *destroy*. 'A peculiar benevo-'lence and sweetness of temper, and a mind in its nature gene-'rous, mild, and compassionate, may be, and without doubt fre-'quently has been, uncorrupted and undepraved by *superstition*; 'and obtained as considerable victories over *that*, as it ever has 'over *atheism*.' And when, in the balance of reason, we are fairly estimating the intrinsic malignity of these false and hurtful principles, we are not to confine ourselves to *actual* consequences, but to the *natural* tendency of each.

'WHAT then is the *proper* tendency of *atheism*?' It sets a man, at loose, from all notion of an universal law of rational beings, and from the fear of a supreme inspector and judge of his actions; and, consequently, leaves the eternal rules of righteousness inforced by no sufficient authority; by no authority at all, that can, in innumerable instances, take cognizance of the violation of them. And whither must this lead? 'to *virtue* it cannot: but it surely 'opens a plain and smooth path to *vice*.'—It raises indeed a *new* and strong temptation to it, to which men are not, by the *first simple impulses* of nature, liable; but which, whenever it meets with inflamed passions and a vicious disposition, can hardly ever fail of being successful.

BUT you will say, '*superstition*, sometimes, totally over-rules 'even the moral sense of the difference between virtue and vice,' which is planted in all mankind, and makes so important a part of the internal constitution of their minds.—'So likewise may '*atheism*.' It requires indeed great violence to suppress it altogether: but I aprehend, that, in this respect, the force of *atheism* may not be, at all, inferior to that of *superstition*. For let it be allowed, that the abovementioned sense of things is *natural*; what

is *nature* to an *atheiſt?* What is it, but the miſ-ſhapen imperfect work of a fortuitous jumble of atoms; or a ſcene of folly, confuſion, and evil, for which there is, in general, no remedy! Nature therefore, in the opinion of ſuch an one, may be *wrong:* and if nature be *wrong*, can conſcience, even though it be allowed to be an undoubted principle of nature, be *right?* Can the obligations of virtue, which are entirely founded on an erroneous and faulty conſtitution, be deemed of ſacred and immutable authority? If the frame of nature is ſuppoſed to be *unfitly* ſettled, the atheiſt will doubtleſs think it incumbent upon him, as far as it is in his power, to *mend* it; to ſhake off unneceſſary ſhackles, and unreaſonable reſtraints upon his liberty; and, under this pretence, *conſcience* may be utterly diſcarded, as the ſlavery of education and cuſtom, and the creature of fancy and enthuſiaſm: and thus all moral government and order will be entirely diſſolved; and no tye left, that is deemed inviolable, but that of intereſt.

We may add, that the ſerious acknowledgement, and contemplation, of Deity baniſhes gloomineſs and horror from the virtuous mind, and makes it ſurvey the world with pleaſure, which would, otherwiſe, appear extremely forlorn and deſolate.—Again, an habitual ſerenity of mind ſprings from a firm belief of the watchful care, and providence, of the great uncontroulable monarch of the world; as abſolute and unlimited in goodneſs, as in power and majeſty And to mention no more, from the ſame ſource are derived compoſure, humble reſignation, fortitude and conſtancy of reſolution, under the moſt unfortunate events of life; from a perſuaſion that all things are rightly managed, on principles of invariable equity and goodneſs, and the enlarging exalted proſpect of a ſtate of perfection and immortality. With theſe eminent advantages, *ſuperſtition*, which is ſometimes ſo *moderate* as not to darken the eſſen-

tial principles of religion, *may not be* inconſiſtent. 'But *atheiſm*, 'of neceſſity, *muſt be ſo*;' and the peculiar baſeneſs and infamy of of it appear from hence, that it ruins the moſt glorious hope that the mind of man can form, *viz.* that of extending his being to eternity; and degrades him to the level of a brute.

And this leads me to make one obſervation more, *viz.* that whereas the effects of *ſuperſtition* are various, and more, or leſs, miſchievous, according to the degree in which it prevails, and *ſome kinds* of ſuperſtition there may be, that are very ſlightly, if at all, detrimental; 'the conſequences of *atheiſm* are, and ever muſt be, 'in general, *the ſame*, under every *form* and *modification* of it. 'Call the opinion by what name you pleaſe, yet if it reſolves it-'ſelf into this at laſt, either that there is *no* God, or *no provi-'dence*, the rational peace, and moſt ſublime pleaſures, of man-'kind are deſtroyed; the ſtrongeſt fence and guard of virtue is 'thrown down; and a breach is made, at which all kinds of vice 'and licentiouſneſs may enter.'

Let me conclude this introduction with remarking, what may ſerve as an uſeful caution againſt the exceſſes of *ſuperſtition*, viz. that it directly *leads* to *atheiſm*. For the Deity, whom the *ſuperſtitious* worſhip, is, in effect, an idol, that has no real exiſtence but in their low and groveling fancies; and, indeed, that cannot, of himſelf, poſſibly exiſt. 'And it frequently happens, that they 'are inwardly ſo *averſe* to the object of their adoration, that they 'would probably ſeek for ſhelter even in *atheiſm*, were they not 'prevented by their *fears*.' Beſides that ſuperſtition has been the main cauſe, in more bold and daring ſpirits, of the growth of atheiſm, and hardens ſuch offenders in their impiety. And the moſt effectual method we can purſue, to prevent this fatal miſ-

chief, is to take care always to deſcribe *religion*, both in our principles and practice, juſt as it is in itſelf, truly *amiable* and *divine*; to baniſh from it every thing *weak* and *trivial*, every thing *gloomy* and *terrifying*; that it may appear in a light *honourable* to the great Creator, and *friendly* to all his creatures.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

Which treats, in general, of the exiſtence of a Deity, or a Firſt Cauſe.

I NOW proceed to ſhew the unreaſonableneſs, and unnatural abſurdity, of *atheiſm*. Not that this is neceſſary with reſpect to the bulk of mankind, ſince their firſt and eaſieſt, and moſt univerſal, apprehenſions of things lead them to the acknowledgement of a ſupreme all-creating *Deity*, whoſe footſteps and the evidences of his being, engraven in ſhining characters, may be diſtinctly traced through every part of the vaſt ſyſtem of nature: I enter therefore, I ſay, upon this point, not becauſe it is of abſolute neceſſity, for the information and conviction of the human mind in general (which may be ſatisfied, herein, from every object which it perceives, and barely from the contemplation of its own inherent powers;) but as the exiſtence of a firſt Former, and of a ſovereign active Intelligence, is the baſis and foundation-principle of all natural religion; and, therefore, in an attempt to illuſtrate every eſſential article belonging to it, ought not to be wholly preſumed, and left unproved. The ſubject has been often and largely handled, and with unanſwerable clearneſs and force of argument (to the everlaſting confuſion and

ſhame, if they were poſſeſſed of that compoſed reflection and liberal ſpirit, which are neceſſary to excite ſhame) of thoſe very few in every age, who have appeared as profeſſed advocates for *atheiſm*, in any of its different ſhapes. I ſhall not therefore be expected, here, to offer many things new or uncommon; though ſome, perhaps, may be ſuggeſted of conſiderable weight (both to beget, and eſtabliſh, a firm unwavering faith in GOD), which the generality are not ſo particularly acquainted with. It will be ſufficient, if I ſtate the proofs *diſtinctly*, and repreſent them in that *train* and *order*, in which they will moſt ſtrongly illuſtrate and confirm each other, and make the evidence, upon the whole, appear more unconteſtable; if I ſhall ſet them in a *light* that is naturally adapted to perſuade, and improve upon hints already given, *retaining* only ſuch parts of the argument as are ſolid, and truly convincing, and *rejecting* the weaker and more inaccurate, which ſerve only to cloud and obſcure the general evidence; and, finally, if I put the whole, eſpecially of the reaſonings which may ſeem more *abſtruſe*, in ſo *clear* a method and ſuch *intelligible* terms, as to render it obvious to every unbiaſſed and attentive underſtanding. All this I ſhall endeavour to do, ſo far as an abridgement, which is here only intended, of very diffuſe and copious reaſonings will admit of: and, in order to this, I chooſe to proceed in the following method.

FIRST, to ſhow, That there neither is, nor can be, any demonſtration *againſt* the *being* of a GOD.

SECONDLY, That if *atheiſm* be not a *demonſtrable*, it cannot be a *probable*, ſcheme. And,

THIRDLY, That there are many moſt important and ſtrong arguments, which confound and overturn *it*; and plain demonſtrations,

tions, to enforce the belief of an *eternal first cause*, and *maker*, of the world.

THE FIRST thing, that comes in order to be proved, is, that there neither is, nor can be, any demonstration *against* the *being* of *a* GOD. By the word GOD in this branch of the argument, I mean no more, than a *first principle* of life and *being*, an *original cause* of all that exists without, or besides, himself: nor ought any man, in exact and strict reasoning, when he confines himself to the proving this single point, the *existence* of *a Deity*, to intend any thing more than clearly to evince, 'that there is *a living intel-* 'ligent *author* of universal nature; who has wisdom and power 'adequate to the effects produced; and every other property *neces-* 'sary to the causing such productions, considered in all their va- 'rious modifications, relations, and circumstances of being; in all 'their connections, subordinations, and uses.'

'WHETHER this supreme and first cause, this universal parent 'of nature, be absolute in wisdom, in power, in goodness, and 'all other natural and moral perfections, are inquiries *subsequent* 'to that—whether there be any first cause.' And therefore several *atheistical* objections, and those ranked amongst the most formidable, are, in my opinion, impertinently introduced under this head, and injudiciously answered; to the confounding the *regular scheme* of natural truths relating to the *Deity*, and the *progressive order* of their disquisition. Thus, for example, the pretended impossibility, that an infinite immaterial substance should exist, does not properly offer itself to be considered, till we come to argue the *spirituality* of GOD. The objection of wrong constitution, of useless or improper parts, of confusion, defect, and irregularity, whether in the natural or moral world, are, if they are objections that may reasonably

ſonably be made uſe of againſt any thing, only to be urged againſt GOD's *juſtice*, or *goodneſs*, or *wiſdom* upon *the whole*; or, againſt the *unbounded extent* of his wiſdom, or power. They have really nothing at all to do with the preſent queſtion, which, as was ſuggeſted before, is this alone, 'whether there be *a fountain of being*, or *a* '*firſt efficient principle*, *equal* to *all* effects and powers of nature '*actually ſubſiſting*; and not what *attributes* may be rightly aſcrib-'ed to him, and in what degree of *tranſcendency*.' The inquiry therefore, *now*, being merely about the exiſtence of a Deity, or of an original and univerſal cauſe; and not about what perfections eſſentially belong to him:

IT neceſſarily follows, that there can be no poſſible demonſtration *againſt* his *being*, conſidered in itſelf and abſtract from all other controverſies, nor any ſeeming, though fallacious, appearance of a demonſtration, but from one or other of the following topics—— Either that the idea of a *firſt cauſe* is in itſelf abſurd; which cannot be, unleſs the idea of *a cauſe*, and conſequently of *an effect*, be alſo in general, and in every ſuppoſable inſtance, abſurd: for bare ſituation and arrangment, priority and conſequence, in the article of *number*, can make no alteration in the natural poſſibility of things. Or if this be not a plauſible objection (as no man, ſurely, who is not abſolutely wild, and diveſted of common underſtanding through the infatuations of ſcepticiſm, will aſſert it is; becauſe while things are poſſible upon the whole, the *firſt*, or *ſecond*, or *third*, whether of cauſes or effects, muſt be equally poſſible)—then, either a *creative power* muſt be a contradiction to reaſon; or there muſt be ſome undeniably appearing *circumſtances*, in the *actual* make and frame of things, which are abſolutely inconſiſtent with their having an *intelligent*, and *voluntary*, cauſe of their exiſtence.

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THE latter can never be urged, even upon the principles of *atheiſm* itſelf: becauſe there is nothing ſo imperfect in reſpect of contrivance, operation of power, or exertion of goodneſs, but what *may* have ſome *cauſe* exactly *proportioned* to it; a *mind* equally *imperfect* in deſign, in efficiency, in kind benevolent propenſions. It will hereafter be ſhewn, that there is, indeed, no defect in any of theſe, but a ſupreme and moſt glorious excellence in all; but my preſent buſineſs is only to ſhew, that there may be an original cauſe adapted to the fabric of nature, whatever it be, whether perfect, or imperfect; and this even the *atheiſt* muſt be forced to allow.

THE only difficulty, therefore, remaining with him, as to the poſſibility of ſome ultimate effecting principle, muſt be—that *creation itſelf* is a thing repugnant to reaſon. And this difficulty ſeems to be, in a great meaſure, founded in the ambiguous and equivocal ſenſe of the word *creation*. Creation has been improperly and looſely defined to be the making things *out of* nothing. This the atheiſt fondly catches at; and has either ſtupidly taken, or would wilfully miſrepreſent, to mean much the ſame—as the formation of an univerſe of beings *out of* nothing, as the ground and firſt principle of their exiſtence; or, in other words, the making *nothing* a real entity, that is, as it were, wrought upon, and tranſmuted into a different form; *i. e.* he himſelf, from an inclination to cavil and perplex the plaineſt and moſt momentous truths, has ſubſtantiated nothing, and urges his own dreams and unconnected imaginations againſt omnipotence, and the being of a GOD. But the matter will be quite clear of every reaſonable objection, if creation be *rightly* explained: for it is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, nothing elſe, ‘ but the firſt communication of dependent exiſtence, nothing

'elſe, but being the author of what could not exiſt of itſelf, as 'having no neceſſary intrinſic ſpring and ſource of being, indepen-'dent of an exterior agency.' And what *contradiction* is there, in this, to any dictate of nature? If there be a contradiction in it, the *atheiſt* can clearly point out to us, to what manifeſt principles of reaſon it is a contradiction; or with what concluſions, drawn from obvious and allowed principles, it evidently interferes. If he can aſſign nothing of this kind (as it has in fact never been yet done), the whole amount of the objection riſes to this only, that he does not comprehend the affair, and, therefore, it is in itſelf incomprehenſible; he does not ſee the particular preciſe manner, in which it *may* be done (*i. e.* he has not the faculties of the GOD of nature, nor his ſcope of activity), and therefore it *can* never be. And yet, notwithſtanding this *atheiſtic* pride, it is as intelligible as the producing any effect, becauſe that is giving being to what before was not; which is the general idea of creation. The only difference lies, not in the *general idea* itſelf, but in the *force* of the powers operating, and the nature of the effects produced; and that GOD is the *firſt* and *univerſal* cauſe; the cauſe of all *ſecondary* cauſes, the cauſe of all the powers by which, and of all the materials from which, all *ſecondary* effects are formed. 'Nor can I 'conceive it to be at all more *ſtupendous*, or more *difficult* to the 'firſt and ſupreme power—to *create*, or *give a being* to *matter* it-'ſelf, which it before had not, than to *create*, or *give a being*, which '*that* befor had not, to *the world* in its preſent form and order. 'But with reſpect to variety of *exertions* of power, and, eſpecially, 'as to excellence of deſign and contrivance, the *formation* of the '*world*, as it *now* is, ſeems, of the two, to have vaſtly the *pre-'heminence*.'

My SECOND obſervation is this, that if *atheiſm* be not a *demonſtrable*, it cannot be a *probable*, ſcheme. And a very few words will be ſufficient to confirm this remark, and put it beyond all reaſonable doubt. For if the *idea* of a Deity, or Firſt Cauſe, be not abſolutely and in itſelf a *contradiction*, what can there be, in any of the viſible appearances of things, to induce any man to imagine, that it is not the *trueſt* and moſt *natural* account of the origin and ſtructure of the world? A ſyſtem, through the whole of which there appears to be the deepeſt deſign, and moſt curious and inimitable ſkill, diſplayed, muſt, with vaſtly greater propriety, be ſuppoſed to be the effect of *intelligence*, of ſome vital, contriving, and wiſely diſpoſing principle (ſince it has been made evident, to a demonſtration, that ſuch a ſupreme, deſigning and active principle there *may* be), than to proceed from any *blind inanimate* cauſes. So that though, among the ſeveral wild ſchemes of *atheiſm*, one may be more *probable*, or, to ſpeak with greater accuracy, leſs *abſurd* than another; yet, as they anſwer not, at all, to any ſingle compoſition even of human art (as will, under the next head, be particularly ſhewn), and much leſs to the exquiſite beauty and harmony of the univerſal fabric of nature, they muſt be in themſelves abſolutely improbable; and compared with the ſcheme of the *atheiſt*, or believer in GOD, have all the preſumptions and marks of falſehood that can appear in any caſe, upon a *general* view and conſideration of the ſubject. Which directly leads me to the

THIRD head, *viz.* That there are many moſt important and ſtrong arguments to confound and overturn all *atheiſtical* pretences; and enforce the belief of an *eternal Firſt Cauſe*, and *Maker*, of the world.

THAT there are various orders of beings exiſting, we know—by intuition, certain deductions of reaſon, external ſenſe, and credible teſtimony. And that *no one* individual, amongſt all theſe different natures, and in the vaſt extent of the univerſe, could *give being to itſelf*, we likewiſe know in the ſtrict ſenſe of the word—*i. e.* with a *demonſtrative* and *infallible* knowledge, as diſtinct from mere *probable opinion:* becauſe, to be the *cauſe* of itſelf, muſt ſuppoſe a thing to exiſt *before* itſelf, and to be both *cauſe* and *effect*. If any one, therefore, through a wanton and capricious affectation of philoſophy out of the common track of reaſon, ſhould diſpute the exiſtence of an *external material world* againſt all the demonſtrations of ſenſe (which he himſelf ever truſts to, in caſes of any importance to his happineſs, though from the *vanity* of *philoſophiſing*, he may diſclaim it in ſuch remote and unavailing theories), he muſt however, of neceſſity, admit, that there is, at leaſt, *one* effect: 'For I think, I perceive, I have ſenſations of pleaſure 'and pain, I reaſon for, or againſt, a Firſt Cauſe and author of 'being—and therefore, *I am*—are inſeparable ideas, and ſelf-evi-'dent truths.'

SOMETHING then there is, which could not be the *cauſe* of its own exiſtence: and how came it to *be?* Of this no other poſſible account can be given, but—either that there has been an *infinite ſeries* of derived and dependent effects, *without a cauſe*; or that there *is* an *original* and *efficient cauſe* of all other beings. The firſt, *viz.* that there are *effects*, and *no cauſe*, is in terms a contradiction, and, of conſequence (as there is no medium between *a cauſe* and *no cauſe*) the latter, *i. e.* the *exiſtence* of ſome *firſt principle* of being, muſt of neceſſity be admitted. And, farther, this whole progreſſion of effects, which is acknowledged by

atheiſm

atheiſm itſelf to be *infinite*, becauſe from all eternity, muſt be allowed to have a cauſe adequate to an *infinity* of effects; or, in other words, a cauſe, which is, in the ſame ſenſe, *infinite*. If the *firſt* in the above-mentioned chain, *be not* ſtrictly *eternal*, and the *cauſe* of the *whole* (and if it *be*, it amounts to the general idea and notion of a *Deity*) *that itſelf*, together with *all the reſt* of the infinite ſeries, muſt be effects *without* a cauſe; which we have ſeen to be, in the abſtract nature of things, *impoſſible*.

THUS far, I humbly apprehend, we have not mere probability, but demonſtrative proof, without any mixture of uncertainty, or danger of error. And this the *atheiſt* has ſeemed to be aware of, and that he had no refuge to ſhelter himſelf in, againſt the weight of ſuch forcible conviction, unleſs it were to aſſert, 'that the *whole* 'infinite *chain* of effects were *neceſſarily exiſting*.' But to this it will be immediately replied, What is your reaſon for maintaining this ſcheme of their neceſſary being? Nothing can be a ſufficient reaſon, but that it is a contradiction in nature to ſuppoſe them *not to be*. And why a contradiction in nature? The oppoſer of a *Deity* has, and can have, no anſwer to make but this—Becauſe they *now are*: which anſwer can yield no manner of ſatisfaction to the moſt ſlight and inconſiderate inquirer, unleſs whatever is neceſſarily is. And this is taking the very thing in debate for granted, *viz.* that there cannot be a *voluntary* cauſe, and producer, of the univerſal conſtitution of things.

BESIDES there are no marks, no ſignatures, of this *neceſſary exiſtence*, in the *frame* of the world itſelf. All the parts of it are fluctuating and mutable, and ſubject to a diverſity of changes; and, as far as appears, capable of *any* or of *all* changes, even to *annihilation* itſelf. There is no contradiction in ſuppoſing, that *any* thing,

thing, or *every* thing, that we now ſee, to be, may abſolutely ceaſe to exiſt: but of whatever exiſts *neceſſarily*, it is a contradiction to imagine that *that* ſhould ever ceaſe to be; and, therefore, this *abſolute neceſſity* of being muſt be quite inconſiſtent with the viſible frame of nature.

AGAIN, if things *neceſſarily* exiſting can never be deprived of being; and if the whole *chain* of things which atheiſm muſt pronounce to be infinite, and to be (for the more ample demonſtration of its abſurdity) both cauſe and effect, can never loſe its being; it is then an undeniable inference, that no one *ſingle* effect, call it what you pleaſe, which is an inſeparable *link* of this neceſſary chain, can ever ceaſe to exiſt, *i. e.* in the very *way*, in which it *actually* exiſts. For it is its *actual* exiſtence, from whence neceſſary being is deduced and concluded, and not the poſſibility of a different form of exiſtence. But that the *mode* of exiſtence is alterable, univerſal experience teſtifies, in *plants*, in *animals*, in *men*, in *all* ſubjects that we have capacity and opportunity to examine; and therefore, as far as it does, or can, appear to us upon the firſt and only principle of this kind of atheiſtic reaſoning, their very *being* muſt alſo be precarious.

BUT, to purſue this argument ſomewhat farther, if *no one* part, of the infinite ſeries and progreſſion of effects, can ever ceaſe to be; and that by a *phyſical* or *natural* neceſſity; it muſt from hence undeniably follow, that every ſingle being is *independently* neceſſary, and would exiſt invariably the ſame, if there were nothing, beſides itſelf, in the univerſe. For whatever *thus* exiſts muſt be *complete* within itſelf; whereas it is undeniable in fact, that there is no one branch of the univerſal ſyſtem which is ſingle, nothing but what has a *relation* to other parts, and is *connected* in its uſe and influence.

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HAVING thus fully proved, that an infinite ſeries of derived and dependent effects, without a Firſt Intelligent Cauſe, is the utmoſt pitch of abſurdity, and that there is no reaſon to ſuppoſe this chain of effects to exiſt neceſſarily, but unanſwerable arguments to be urged in oppoſition to it—nothing remains, but either—that the world was formed by *chance*—or was the effect of ſome *underſtanding cauſe*. And what would any man think, if he was ſhewn a book accurately written, or a palace built with the exacteſt regularity and moſt perfect elegance, ſhould he be deſired to believe, that all this happened merely by *chance* without any intelligence or art, he would unqueſtionably think, that the perſon, who made this propoſal to him, was either extravagantly ludicrous, or had entirely loſt his ſenſes. But the *volume* of the creation is infinitely more artificial, the world, which is the *temple*, or *palace*, of GOD, is of a ſtructure infinitely more grand and wonderful, than for the utmoſt perfection of human ſkill even to imitate, without falling inconceivably ſhort of the beauty and glory of the original. The making this, therefore, to be purely *fortuitous* and *accidental*, is the wildeſt folly, that the human mind can poſſibly be capable of. If it had loſt its faculties altogether, it would ſcarce be more ſunk beneath the offices and operations of reaſon; and it ſeldom, in the worſt kinds of natural and unavoidable phrenzy, ſinks half ſo low.

BUT to offer, briefly, ſome direct arguments againſt this ſcheme of univerſal *cauſality*, though, for its meaneſs and utter irrationality, it be quite unworthy our concern: let it be conſidered,

IN the *firſt* place, that if the world was formed by *chance*, the *matter* of the world, contrary to the opinion of the epicurean *atheiſt*, muſt alſo have been a fortuitous production. For it has been

been ſhewn, that the world could not exiſt neceſſarily; and, of conſequence, that it could not be *eternal*; and this argument muſt be equally ſtrong with reſpect to the *matter* of the world, as to the *form* of it: which muſt thoroughly confound this ſcheme of atheiſm, that extends the operation of *chance* only to the various *modifications* of being, but does not ſuppoſe it capable of cauſing the very *eſſential natures*, and *ſubſtances*, of things to exiſt.

AGAIN, *ſecondly*, the parts of matter, by which the preſent form and order of it were *caſually* produced, were either from eternity in *motion*, or at *reſt*: if in *motion*, as the ſenſeleſs atheiſt, whom we are now confuting, aſſerts, this *motion*, being without an external cauſe, muſt be an *eſſential property* of matter; and, then, it will be abſolutely impoſſible, that any, the minuteſt, particle of matter ſhould ever be at *reſt*. And ſo, on the contrary, if it was from eternity at *reſt*, without ſome power exiſting *beſides* itſelf, it could never be put into *motion*. So that both the authors, and abetters, of this fooliſh dream appear to have been extremely ignorant, and deſtitute of the very firſt principles of philoſophy, and natural knowledge.

THIRDLY, Chance is no *cauſe* at all, nor can be a *cauſe* of any the leaſt production. It amounts to no more than a *may be*; which, every one ſees, cannot account for *real* and *determinate* exiſtence: but a more adequate and ſatisfactory reaſon muſt be aſſigned, why things *actually are*. *Chance* leaves the being of every thing *uncertain*; and therefore, in the general conſideration of it, is directly repugnant to the idea of *cauſality*.

FOURTHLY, It is altogether incredible, that the particular curious form and order of the world ſprang merely from *chance*, becauſe there were *equal* chances for, at leaſt, an hundred thouſand different forms. So that the probability, againſt this atheiſtical deluſion, is as an hundred thouſand, and, *perhaps*, as an hundred millions, to *one*. And whoever can aſſent to it, upon theſe grounds, muſt have faith enough to embrace any ſcheme of inconſiſtency and irreligion, however wild and unnatural, that can ever be propoſed to the world.—Beſides it is a contradiction, to the very nature of *chance*, that it ſhould never vary from itſelf, but be always regular and uniform, conſiſtent and harmonious; that infinite wiſdom itſelf could not manifeſt greater ſkill, nor maintain a more conſtant order, in the grandeur and immenſity of the works of nature, their correſpondence to each other, their exact proportions, without either redundancy or defect, in the exquiſite ſtructure of particulars, in the magnificent compoſition and ſymmetry of the whole. And if both *neceſſity*, and *chance*, can yield but romantic, and quite incredible, accounts of the true cauſe and origin of nature, we are under a neceſſity of introducing an *intelligent* DEITY, to mend this confuſion of ſcepticiſm and falſe philoſophy; and muſt, as the concluſion of all, reſt in the ſentiment of St. *Paul*, that *the inviſible things of* GOD, *from the creation of the world, are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made—even his eternal power and godhead.* Which is a truth, that *ſhines* glorioufly in the ſplendor of the ſun, and *diffuſes* itſelf throughout all nature; which, as it were, *vegetates* in every plant, *lives* in every animal, and appears, with the *brighteſt* demonſtrations of *reaſon*, in *intelligent* natures. This ſenſible evidence it is, that ſuits beſt to the capacities of all mankind, and is univerſally ſtriking and efficacious.

I SHALL only add, that in the very idea of a *Firſt Cauſe*, whoſe exiſtence has now been demonſtrated, are comprehended his *eternity*, otherwiſe he muſt have a cauſe of his own being, and ſo could not be the *firſt*; his *ſelf-exiſtence* and *independence*, as he is the *original* being, and *underived*; and his exiſting by a *neceſſity* of nature, or, that it is a contradiction to ſuppoſe him *not* to *be*. I have therefore only to diſcourſe of, in order, (to form a complete and digeſted ſcheme of the attributes of GOD) his *unity*, his *ſpirituality*, his *omnipreſence*, his *knowledge*, his *wiſdom*, his abſolute *rectitude* of nature and immutable *perfection*, his *juſtice*, his *goodneſs*, his *power* and *active providence*, his *mercy* and *placability*: all which ſhall be diſtinctly conſidered, in the rank in which they now ſtand—to which, ſhall be added, the natural and moral proofs of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; all which taken together, and handled in their juſt extent, will conſtitute an entire ſcheme of the principles of *Natural Religion*.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Which---after ſome previous remarks on the Eternity, *and what ſchool-divines have ſtiled the* Simplicity, *of* GOD---*ſhews, that the* Firſt Cauſe *is but* One; *and diſtinctly conſiders his* ſpirituality, omnipreſence, *and* immenſity.

I OBSERVED, towards the concluſion of the laſt chapter, that the *eternity* of GOD was neceſſarily implied, in his being the firſt cauſe of all other exiſtences. And this the unperverted reaſon of mankind will readily aſſent to; becauſe whatever has not exiſted from eternity, in the ſtrict ſenſe of the word *eternity*, muſt have had, ſome time or other, a beginning of its exiſtence, and, conſequently, a cauſe *prior* to itſelf. I thought it, therefore, needleſs, to make the eternity of GOD the ſubject of a particular inquiry; ſince the chief part of it muſt have been employed in ſuch intricate metaphyſical reaſonings, as could be of no uſe either to improve the underſtanding, or ſubſerve the great purpoſes of piety and natural religion. My time, I apprehend, would have been very unprofitably ſpent, in confuting the abſurd jargon of ſcholaſtic and ſyſtematical ſchemes of divinity; and particularly ſuch principles as that which follows; *viz.* that the eternity of GOD is one ſtanding, fixed, invariable *point*, that admits of no *ſucceſſive* duration, and in which all eternity is at once included; the paſt, the preſent, and the future. So that, for infinite ages back, the preſent moment was not only in the *view* of the divine omniſcience, but *actually* exiſting, and, conſequently, all the tranſactions

of it really *were*, miriads of ages *before* any ſuch tranſactions happened; *all* eternity ever *was* at *once*, and *from* eternity; though there be an eternal duration, and an eternal ſeries of facts and occurrences ſtill *to come*. The whole of which, though it is ſuppoſed to be the calculation and eſtimate of divine omniſcience, is an abſolute impoſſibility in nature, and confounds all the differences of things. For if the paſt and preſent exiſt *together* in one indiviſible *point*, the *inſtant* of their duration being the ſame, *they themſelves* muſt alſo be the ſame; *i. e.* the paſt is *not* paſt, but *preſent*, and, by the very ſame train and conſequence of arguing, the preſent is *not* preſent but *paſt*; and the future is *paſt*, and *preſent*, though it has as yet *no being* at all.

AND as it would have been moſt egregious trifling, at leaſt, when there are more important ſubjects that offer themſelves to our conſideration, to have entered, more deeply, into the confutation of ſuch wild and romantic fancies as theſe; ſo, I think, there are no great uſes of religion, that could be ſerved by a particular diſcourſe on the *eternity* of GOD, but what will fall in naturally, and with equal weight, under ſome or other of the attributes, which I propoſe diſtinctly to illuſtrate.—Indeed, the eternity of GOD ſeems, of *itſelf*, to yield no moral uſes at all: but all the comfort of it, and all its influence upon virtue and truth, are derived, and ſpring chiefly, from the *character* of the great Being, who, in the lofty ſtile of ſcripture, *inhabiteth eternity*; and, eſpecially, from his *moral excellencies*. And the rational motives to piety, ſo far as *this* attribute of the Deity is at all concerned, are only—that there is *eternal* ſupreme *juſtice*, *eternal* conſummate *goodneſs*, *eternal* reſiſtleſs *power*, *eternal* unerring *wiſdom* to preſide over, diſpoſe, and guide to happineſs, the univerſe of *rational* beings; to ſupply and cheriſh *animal* life, as long as there is any neceſſity,

neceſſity, or reaſon, for its being continued, and to regulate every part of *inanimate* and *inſenſible* nature, ſo as to keep it in a conſtant ſubordination to this ultimate, and nobleſt, purpoſe of univerſal *creation* and *providence*.

AND if there needs nothing further to be ſaid upon the head of GOD's having exiſted from eternity, and the interminable extent of his future being—neither his *ſelf-origination*, nor his *neceſſary exiſtence*, can afford uſeful matter for a particular large diſcuſſion; becauſe they conſtitute, ſtrictly ſpeaking, no *new* ideas, and are only the *modifications*, and *peculiar characters* of his eternal duration; and, therefore, when eternal duration *itſelf* is conſidered and treated of as the eternal duration of the *Deity*, the circumſtances, which are peculiar to *that alone*, muſt be unavoidably included.

LET me only add one more, under this claſs of obſervations, *viz.* that I have omitted, in the account given of the divine attributes, what dark and myſterious divines have called by the name of the *ſimplicity* of GOD; becauſe if they mean any thing more, 'than 'that he is not *compounded* of diviſible parts, liable to a diſſolution; 'or of diſagreeing, incoherent, unharmonious parts; or of any ma-'terial principles;' it is, to me, quite incomprehenſible. If they intend by this phraſe (as it ſhould ſeem they do, by their denying that he is compounded of *diſtinct* properties), that wiſdom and power in GOD (for example) are reducible to *one* general idea, though the immutable natures of the things themſelves do, and ever muſt, convey *two* quite *different* ideas; they muſt be prodigiouſly fond of myſteries. Or if (as is highly probable from other dark expreſſions) they would inſinuate, that real *action* in GOD, and the *power* to act, are not, even in juſt conception and theory, diſtinguiſhable from each other; this, I believe, will appear likewiſe

wiſe to be very ſurpriſing and extravagant to every common underſtanding. For if the *power* of acting, in the Firſt Cauſe and Author of nature, be not fitly diſtinguiſhed, becauſe, in him, not really different from the *actual exerciſe* of that power—the whole world, all creatures that now are, or ever ſhall be, and we ourſelves among the reſt, muſt have exiſted from eternity; becauſe GOD's power to create is eſſential to, and muſt therefore have been co-eternal with his nature. But this fact, however indubitable as the natural conſequence of their own poſitions, theſe myſtic reaſoners will, themſelves, generally deny; and we *know* it to be falſe from our own experience, and innumerable clear demonſtrations.

LEAVING, then, this wild and dark jargon of the ſchools, I proceed to diſcourſe, briefly, on the great article of the *unity* of GOD. Many have thought, that the *unity* of GOD may be neceſſarily inferred from the idea of *ſelf-exiſtence*; and, accordingly, the proof of this has been attempted by a moſt judicious and celebrated writer *. But as the argument is too abſtruſe for common apprehenſions, however weighty and concluſive in itſelf; I ſhall endeavour to eſtabliſh, this important principle of all religion, in a clearer and more intelligible manner. And, that I may avoid all confuſion in treating of it, I would obſerve,

IN the FIRST place, that the point, *now* to be proved, is *not*, 'that there *is one* GOD', ſince *this* has been already demonſtrated; becauſe, whoever produces certain evidence, 'that there is *a* GOD,' ſhews with equal unqueſtionable evidence, 'that there is *one* GOD:' *a* GOD, and *a* Firſt Cauſe, and *one* that is *the* ſupreme Deity, or *the* Firſt Cauſe, being terms of ſtrictly the ſame import, and con-

* Dr. *S. Clark*, in his Demonſtration, &c.

veying neither fewer, nor more ideas, in their proper and juſt ſignification.

AND the not attending, to this true definition, has created the greateſt part of the confuſion and obſcurity, that have entangled and perplexed the ſubject. For, from hence, it appears, that what we are required by the oppoſers of the *unity* of GOD, to demonſtrate, is another very different propoſition, namely,—'that there 'is *but* one,' or, 'that there is *no more* than one;' for which, as it is a *negative* propoſition, it is not reaſonable to expect demonſtration. Of the exiſtence of *one* GOD we are certain: and it lies entirely upon thoſe, who are not ſatisfied with this, to offer ſome direct and poſitive proofs to convince us, that there is, and muſt be, a *plurality* of Gods. And to expect the contrary demonſtration from us (which, in the caſe of innumerable *negative* propoſitions, is a thing impoſſible) is, in my opinion, very abſurd and extravagant. If in ſuch caſes, as theſe, we are not able to demonſtrate, there may be no want of the greateſt evidence that the nature of things will admit of; but only an impoſſibility of our attaining to a particular kind of evidence, which is not at all neceſſary. For there may be heighths of *probability*, or degrees of, what is called, *moral certainty*, equally perſuaſive ſo as to remove all rational ground of doubt, and, juſtly, of equal influence in regulating the ſchemes and conduct of human life, as the ſtricteſt *demonſtrations* of truth. And this, I apprehend, will fully appear from the particular inſtance now before us, when the following things are briefly ſtated, and conſidered.

FIRST, 'That *one cauſe*, equal to the production and maintenance of the preſent frame of things, is as much as is *neceſſary* to 'be ſuppoſed, and, therefore, as much as *ought* to be ſuppoſed.' *This* we

we are ſure of; to *this*, therefore, we adhere; and it is the ridiculous, and a kind of enthuſiaſtic, madneſs of ſcepticiſm, to perplex itſelf, and to be impertinently curious about any thing *beyond* this.

SECONDLY, 'As there are evidences of *one* DEITY, which unconteſtably prove *his* exiſtence, we may reaſonably infer from hence, that if there was *another*, there would be convincing proofs of *his* being likewiſe; if *more* than *two*, further evidence of this *additional plurality*'—we might, indeed, juſtly expect (as the knowledge of *all* would be equally uſeful with the knowledge of *any* ſingle one) that there ſhould be expreſs and undeniable *traces* of a *multiplicity* of Gods, if ſuch there actually were; and ſuch plain traces too, as would point out the *preciſe number* of theſe firſt efficient DEITIES—*as clearly*, as the exiſtence of *one* GOD is, in general, demonſtrated. Otherwiſe, the world could ſcarce be ſuppoſed to be the production of *wiſe* artificers, becauſe it muſt be groſsly defective in one grand deſign of wiſdom, *viz.* 'the directing reaſonable creatures to the *origin* of things, to the *true cauſes*, and *authors*, of their being.' But nothing, *like* this, appears in the whole viſible conſtitution of nature: and, therefore, the mere ſuppoſition, of a *plurality* of GODS, muſt be quite wild and extravagant.

AGAIN, THIRDLY, 'If there be *more* firſt cauſes than *one*, they are either *equal* in perfections of nature, or *unequal*.' If *unequal*, there muſt be *ſome* ſuperior in wiſdom and power to the *reſt*; which would quite ſuperſede the *neceſſity*, and all the *uſes*, of *their* exiſtence: or if, notwithſtanding, they are *all* allowed to have *acted*, there muſt be a viſible *diſparity*, with reſpect to juſtneſs of deſign, and curioſity and ſkill of workmanſhip, in the ſeveral parts of the wonderful fabric of the univerſe. But of this there is not

the leaſt diſcovery; the whole being completely exquiſite and marvellous, both in its contrivance and compoſition. And, on the other hand, if the firſt effecting cauſes be imagined to be abſolutely *equal*, the ſcheme of *poly-theiſm* will be altogether as abſurd and irrational; becauſe the ſuppoſition of *one* DEITY is fully ſufficient, to account for *all* the appearances of nature, and the *whole* adminiſtration of providence.

'FOR *one* being neceſſarily exiſting, of immutable excellence, 'and poſſeſſed of *infinite* wiſdom, power, and goodneſs (which is 'the univerſal idea of the ſupreme DEITY) is as capable of *mak*-'*ing* the *preſent*, and all *poſſible*, worlds, and of *governing* the 'world to the utmoſt perfection of natural and moral govern-'ment, as *two*, *three*, or a *thouſand*, ſuch beings can be ſuppoſed 'to be.' *Infinite* wiſdom and power, which are ſuppoſed to reſide in the *one* creator and monarch of the univerſe, cannot be increaſed, nor, conſequently, can the effects of them be rendered, in the leaſt, more complete and admirable: and this demonſtrates, beyond all contradiction, that there can be *no poſſible ground*, on which to imagine, that there is *more* than *one*. And whatever there is *no ground* in reaſon to ſuppoſe, nor *any medium* in nature to prove (if it ought not to be ranked among things abſolutely *impoſſible*) it muſt, however, be madneſs to aſſert. For how can any man contend for, or even introduce, that as a point of controverſy which he neither has nor can have *any foundation* for eſpouſing, nor the *leaſt plauſible colour* of reaſon to ſupport? All *nature* is againſt him, as well as the abſtract *reaſon* of the thing itſelf, becauſe there is nothing to be ſeen, in the external world, but *unity* of deſign, and *harmony* of operation. So that this attribute of the DEITY muſt, of neceſſity, reſt upon a ſteady and immutable baſis, becauſe all the *appearances* of nature are for it, and there is *no poſſibility* of framing a rational objection againſt it.

SUFFER me however, before I dismiss the consideration of this attribute of *unity*, as essentially belonging to the supreme Being, to make a short remark, or two, upon the *Manichean* opinion,—*viz.* 'that there are *two* infinite, eternal, independent principles, *equal* 'in skill and power; the one an absolutely *good*, the other a *ma-* 'lignant and *evil* principle; who are the distinct, and opposite, 'authors of the *good* and *evil*, that appear in the universe.' As to this I would observe,

FIRST, That it may be rightly estimated as a scheme of *atheism*; because if 'there be not a *single*, *uniform*, *invariable* plan and order, 'maintained in the disposition and government, especially, of the 'moral world,' it must amount to the same upon the whole, in its religious and practical consequences, as the utter *non-existence* of DEITY.

SECONDLY, That 'if the *origin* of *evil* can be reasonably and 'clearly accounted for, upon admitting but *one* principle of na- 'ture, supremely *good*' (as will, hereafter, be shewn in its proper place) the *Manichee* can have no *possible* foundation, in the nature and truth of things, for setting up his *evil* DEITY; because, upon *this* state of the case, it is altogether unnecessary, and, of course, a mere presumptuous and arbitrary fancy.

AND, THIRDLY, The consequence of allowing *two repugnant* principles, *equal* in contrivance and operation, must be this unavoidably, 'that no single *existence*, that neither *good* nor *evil*, could 'be produced but by *mutual consent*;' because the force *opposing*, every such effect, must be always adequate to the power *producing*, and must therefore, of necessity, frustrate the event. And

no

no agreement could, doubtleſs, be formed between beings of ſuch *contrary* diſpoſitions, and ſo irreconcileably *averſe* to each other, but upon this ſingle preliminary ground, *viz.* that the *proportions* of good and evil, throughout the whole univerſe, ſhould be for ever, and exactly, *equal*. But there is no *mark* at all of ſuch an abſolute equality, ſo far as the world is ſubject to our obſervation; on the contrary, every-where, the *good*, or the *evil*, viſibly *preponderates*.

I SHALL only add, 'that *equal* mixtures, and degrees, of good 'and evil are, upon the whole, *neither* good, *nor* evil;' and therefore it is ſcarce conceivable, how, upon *this* baſis (which yet is the *only* one) *two* beings, ſtrongly concerned for the ſuperior prevalence of one of theſe above the other, ſhould ever *agree*. We have the utmoſt reaſon, therefore, notwithſtanding all the objections that have hitherto appeared, to acquieſce firmly, and without the leaſt heſitation, in this great and important article of natural religion—the *unity* of GOD.

NOR is it an important branch of *natural* truth only, but, likewiſe, a fundamental principle of *revealed* religion. And therefore *Moſes*, the great *Jewiſh* prophet, has, in expreſs words, made it the baſis of his whole ſcheme; and inculcated it, upon the *Jews*, as a principle that ought always to be ſteadily adhered to: *Hear, O* Iſrael (*i. e.* attend to this chiefly, and keep it always ſtrongly impreſſed upon the mind, that) *the* LORD *thy* GOD *is one* LORD *. The whole ſtrain of revelation is to the ſame general purpoſe—That, *the* LORD is *the true* GOD, and GOD *alone* †—GOD *in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; and that there is none elſe* ‡—That GOD *is one*, i. e. *one* infinite intelligent *ſpirit*, or *one perſon*—

* Deut. vi. 4. † Jer. x. 10. Pſalm lxxxvi. 16. ‡ Deut. iv. 39.

the ſame, who is ſtiled, by CHRIST, *the only true* GOD *—the *one God, the father, of whom* are *all things* †. Thus, does the doctrine of *revelation* perfectly coincide with the uncorrupted ſentiment, and clear voice, of *nature*. And to this there can be but one, ſeeming, objection made, *viz.* 'that *other* beings beſides 'the eternal and immutable DEITY, *angels*, *magiſtrates*, &c. are, 'in the ſcriptures both of the old and new teſtament, diſtinguiſhed 'by the title and character of *Gods*: and how then, it will be 'aſked, can it be conſiſtently made a principle of *revealed* religion, 'that there is but *one* GOD?' To which it will be needleſs, for me, to give any other than this ſhort anſwer—that the phraſes the *one*, or the *only*, GOD have exactly the ſame preciſe meaning, in all the above-mentioned paſſages, as the *chief* or *ſupreme* GOD. And this may be illuſtrated, beyond all reaſonable exception, by other parallel texts. For as, when it is ſaid that GOD *only* is *holy* (though *angels* alſo are denominated *holy* ‡) the ſenſe is, that he *alone* is *abſolutely* and *unchangeably holy*; as it is affirmed, that GOD is the *only potentate* ||, becauſe he is the *original*, *independent* and *ſupreme* potentate; that *beſides* him there is *no Saviour* § (though that title be attributed to *others* likewiſe) becauſe they are but *ſubordinate* ſaviours; and that there is *none good but one*, that is, GOD ††, though we read both of *good men*, and *good ſpirits* of a higher order: In exactly the ſame way, and idiom, of ſpeech, is he declared to be the *only* GOD, becauſe he *alone* is the moſt *high* and *neceſſarily-exiſting* GOD; and all others are *ſubject* to him, and *depend* upon him both for their being, and authority.

AND now this great point being firmly ſettled, both on the principles of nature and revelation, we learn from it,

* Joh. xvii. 3. † 1 Cor. viii. 6. ‡ Revelat. xv. 4. || 1 Tim. vi. 15.
§ Hoſ. xiii. 4. †† Matth. xix. 17.

FIRST,

FIRST, That there *is*, and *can* be, but *one* ſupreme object of religious worſhip. For the *unity* of GOD as neceſſarily infers his being the *only* object of our higheſt reverence, love, and adoration, as his infinite excellencies, and the relation he ſtands in to us, infer an obligation of worſhipping him *at all*. And it muſt be as contrary to the reaſon of things, to acknowledge any, *beſides* him, as infinitely perfect, the author of being and happineſs, upon whom the whole creation depends; as it is to affirm, that there is *no* firſt cauſe, *no* ſupreme governor of the univerſe, or entirely to *neglect* the *worſhip* of the DEITY.

UPON exactly the ſame foundation, in nature, we learn further, that there *is*, and *can* be, but *one* original ſource, from whence all our comfort muſt flow, and in whom our hope and confidence muſt ultimately center; but *one* fountain of mercy; *one* ſupreme lawgiver, governor, and judge; *one* ſovereign arbiter, and univerſal diſpenſer, of happineſs or miſery.

AGAIN, we may juſtly conclude, from the *unity* of GOD, that there *is*, and *can* be, but *one* ultimate end purſued, from the beginning to the conſummation of all things, throughout the ſeveral periods of time, and to all eternity; and, conſequently, we may reaſonably expect to find always, and in every part of the univerſe (what we actually ſee to be the caſe at preſent) *unity* and *correſpondence* of deſign, and *harmonious* operation. Whatever, upon examining *ſubordinate final cauſes*, we ſee to be the *common point* in which they all centre, we may fairly fix upon, as the *chief*, and *grand*, end of divine creation, and providence, upon *the whole*.

AND,

AND, in the LAST place, the inference is equally natural—that there is *one*, and *but one*, univerſal and immutable recommendation of all intelligent beings, according to their different circumſtances, to the protection, and favourable regard, of the ſupreme adminiſtration and government of the univerſe.

I SHALL only add, for the concluſion of this head, that though the two laſt of theſe inferences, relating to *one end* of government, and *one recommendation* to mercy upon the whole, are juſtly *deduced* from the *unity* of GOD; yet they are, in my opinion, neither *together*, nor *apart*, a clear and poſitive *argument* for the attribute of *unity*; for upon the ſuppoſition, that there were *two* or *three* co-equal Deities, poſſeſſed of exactly the ſame degrees of natural and moral perfection, the ultimate *deſign* purſued would be the ſame, and the general *ground* of favour the ſame; becauſe infinite wiſdom and infinite goodneſs could no more contradict themſelves, in *diſtinct* Deities, than they could in the *ſelf-ſame* ſingle, individual, nature; the thing itſelf being an abſolute and eternal contradiction. I have, therefore, choſen to introduce theſe things, rather as *concluſions*, than as *proofs*: and, in this light, they are abſolutely unexceptionable. But, if in thus departing from the more *uſual* method of treating the ſubject, I ſhall be thought to be miſtaken, I humbly ſubmit myſelf to the correction of the candid reader.

AND now, having finiſhed all that I intend to offer, concerning the *unity*; I proceed to treat, briefly, of the *ſpirituality*, of GOD.

AND the FIRST thing that preſents itſelf to be conſidered, in an argument upon this eſſential attribute of the divine nature, is—what

what it really means; or what is the general idea, which we form, of the *ſpiritual*, or, as I would rather chooſe to expreſs it, the *incorporeal* or *immaterial* nature of GOD. This idea, it muſt be allowed, is chiefly *negative:* and the main amount of it is (upon which account I have preferred the negative terms), that he is *not* body, that he is *not* what we call matter; but of an order or ſpecies of being eſſentially *diſtinct* from *theſe*. And as we have no notion at all of *matter*, but from its known and experienced *properties*, to deny, that GOD has the univerſal and inſeparable *attributes* of *material being*, is to affirm, that he is a *ſpirit*; and is all, that, in this limited ſtate of intelligence and comprehenſive power (in which the intimate and peculiar compoſition of *all* ſubſtances, without exception, is unknown to us) we can pretend to demonſtrate, or be required to demonſtrate.

BUT let it not be inſinuated, that this is endeavouring the proof of nothing preciſe and determinate, and fully intelligible, in its own diſtinct and ſpecific nature, and conſequently the proof of nothing *real*; becauſe every one muſt allow—that it may be *poſſible* to demonſtrate, even to the higheſt degree of *certainty*, that what implies in it *imperfection*, *variety*, and *limited being*, ſhould not, and cannot without the greateſt abſurdity, be aſcribed to the original eternal cauſe and author of nature, without being *able*, completely, to deſcribe the ſublime and tranſcendent *manner* in which he exiſts —and, that the proving the *immaterial* nature of the DEITY will anſwer all the purpoſes, with reſpect to natural religion, that the moſt accurate knowledge of his internal hidden eſſence (if a finite underſtanding were capable of comprehending an infinite) could poſſibly do.

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The only idea then, that we can form of a *ſpiritual* nature, being this, that it is eſſentially oppoſite to the *groſs properties*, which denominate *matter*, or *corporeal* ſubſtance, our deſcription of it muſt neceſſarily be—'that it is *not* what is *tangible*, i. e. what 'may be felt, or diſcerned by the *touch*; that it is not *diviſible* into 'parts, nor, conſequently, liable to a total *diſſolution*; that it is 'not ſubject to any of the *external* human *ſenſes*, and, therefore, 'neceſſarily *inviſible*; that it is *penetrable*, or, in other words, 'that *matter* may *co-exiſt* with *it*, in the ſelf-ſame dimenſions of 'ſpace; that it is not *paſſive*, and what produces its effects by *neceſ-* 'ſity, but a *living*, *intelligent*, and *active* principle.' This, to the firſt perceptions and apprehenſions of men, can, in general, have nothing abſurd or incredible in it: but *impaſſive* and *voluntary* muſt, in itſelf, be as eaſy to be conceived, as *mechanical* and *paſſive* nature; *inviſible*, as *viſible*; *penetrable*, as *impenetrable*; things *indiſcernible* by ſenſe, as thoſe which are *diſcernible*. Even, in the *material* world, there are innumerable things *imperceptible*, by the *preſent* ſtructure of the ſenſitive faculties of human nature; and this may juſtly lead us to conclude, that there are other things too *refined*, for the obſervation and ſcrutiny of *any* poſſible material ſenſes. And as for '*pure intelligence*, diveſted abſolutely of all *cor-* '*poreal* mixture,' it is altogether as intelligible, in the abſtract nature of things, as '*corporeal* eſſence, without any conjunction or 'ſuperintendency of *intellect*.' Active nature, again, muſt be as poſſible as merely paſſive, unleſs it can be ſhewn, that 'action is in 'itſelf a contradiction;' which it would be ridiculous to aſſert, and the very idea of *non-action* ſuppoſes it is not.

How, therefore, the *atheiſt* could ever urge the *impoſſibility* of incorporeal exiſtence, againſt the *ſpirituality*, and, as ſome have done,

done, againſt the very *being* of a GOD, is abſolutely unaccountable. For the very attempt to prove, *immaterial* ſubſtance to be an impoſſibility, argues groſs vanity; and that we imagine ourſelves not only to have a juſt exact diſcernment of the actual natures, but of all the poſſibilities, of things. And, beſides, the notion of incorporeal ſubſtance can never be proved to be a contradiction, unleſs we could certainly demonſtrate, that 'the univerſal idea of ſubſtance implied in it *matter*, or *corporeal* ſubſtance;' which, to aſſert without proof (and the *atheiſt* himſelf knows that he can here produce no proof) is taking the very thing, in controverſy, for granted. But, in truth, the notion of an incorporeal ſubſtance (as was hinted before) is altogether as comprehenſible as that of a material. We know nothing of *matter*, but its *properties*—that 'it is extended, diviſible, paſſive, *&c.*' And we know as much of *ſpirit*—that 'it has perception, judgment, volition, memory, and other attributes peculiar to itſelf, or to a particular order and ſpecies of beings.' When, therefore, we are acquainted with the diſtinct *characters* of each, and with nothing *more*, and ſee as much of the *operations* of one, as of the other; to aſſert, that *one* of theſe ſubjects, equally probable with reſpect to our underſtandings, may exiſt, but that the *other* is in nature impoſſible, muſt tend to confound all truth, and all the evidences of truth.

THIS is the ſtupid and inconſiſtent folly of *atheiſm*. But the believer in an immaterial DEITY might as well ſuppoſe, as thought and intelligence are not univerſally connected with material being, that there is not an univerſe *externally*, but only an *ideal* univerſe, ſubſiſting, and that 'all nature is *ſpirit* and *intelligence*;' as the other can poſſibly conceive it to be 'all *matter*.' I ſhall however

offer, very briefly, what I apprehend to be the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt arguments, for the *ſpirituality* of the ſelf-exiſtent DEITY.

AND, FIRST, preſuming for the preſent, and taking for granted, that the eſſence of GOD is *immenſe*, or, that it fills all ſpace (as will, I hope, be plainly proved in the concluding part of this chapter) his *materiality* is abſolutely impoſſible; becauſe *two material* ſubſtances cannot *exiſt together*, in the ſelf-ſame individual parts of ſpace: this is an allowed principle, and proved by inconteſtable demonſtration. And, therefore, if GOD was a *material* ſubſtance, there could *no matter* exiſt beſides himſelf; the very idea of *material creation*, contrary to what has been already ſhewn, would be abſurd; and we ourſelves, with reſpect to our *corporeal* frame, muſt be *eſſential parts* (if we may aſcribe parts to a being indiviſible) of GOD. And as we, and all the other *material* parts of the univerſe which are expoſed to our obſervation, or any way ſubject to our knowledge, are *mutable*, entirely *mutable*, the DEITY *himſelf*, muſt likewiſe be capable of an entire new *change*, an entire *diſſolution*; which has been ſhewn to be utterly repugnant to the idea of a *firſt cauſe*, in which *unchangeable* and *eternal* being is of neceſſity involved.

SECONDLY, If GOD was a *material* being *immenſely* extended (ſtill anticipating the proof a little, and taking the divine immenſity for granted) if GOD, I ſay, was a *material* being, there could be no poſſible *vacuum*, or *void*, in any part of *ſpace*; nor, of conſequence, any ſuch thing as *motion*; in direct contradiction to ſenſe, and univerſal experience.

THIRDLY, The *intelligence* of GOD has, in general, been ſufficiently proved from his being the *cauſe*, the original *voluntary*

cauſe, of all other beings. But *intelligence* is not *eſſential* to matter: it is, no where, a *diſcernible property* of matter; it cannot be deduced, from *any* of the *known* properties of matter. It cannot even be ſhewn to be *poſſible*, that it ſhould *inhere* in matter, as its proper ground, or ſubject; and therefore it ought, upon the higheſt probabilities, to be aſſigned to *a ſubſtance* of a quite *different* nature. For if matter be not *univerſally* intelligent (as it is downright ſottiſhneſs to ſuppoſe it is) intelligence muſt ariſe from particular *motions*, and *configurations* of matter. But figure and motion, in *all poſſible* varieties, are ſtill but figure and motion, and have no *connection* with, no *reſemblance* of, mental ideas, and inward reflection. *Theſe laſt*, therefore, are naturally and juſtly appropriated to ſubſtances *incorporeal*; and, conſequently, the DEITY, the fountain and firſt ſource of intelligence, muſt be moſt refined and perfect *ſpirit*. And, finally, matter, as is univerſally acknowledged, is entirely *paſſive*, and, as far as appears to us, incapable of *ſelf-direction*, and of a *voluntary determination*: it, therefore, falls vaſtly beneath the excellency of the *human mind*, and infinitely beneath the idea of that *ſelf-exiſtent* being, who fixed, and preſerves in moſt admirable order, the univerſal courſe of things; and for whoſe *pleaſure*, as the reſult of his ſupreme deſigning wiſdom, and *voluntary* goodneſs, and not from uncontroulable *neceſſity*, they *are*, and *were created*.

LET us now ſee, what *revelation* teaches, with reſpect to this attribute of the DEITY, this plain principle of *natural* religion. And here we find in general, that the idea, which it gives us of *ſpirit*, is juſt as I have ſtated it from reaſon, for the moſt part *negative*. Thus CHRIST himſelf inſtructed his diſciples, after his reſurrection, in the following paſſage—*Behold my hands, and my feet, that it is I myſelf; handle me, and ſee: for a* ſpirit *hath not*

fleſh and bones, as ye ſee me have *. And the particular *characters*, and *deſcriptions*, of GOD's *ſpirituality*, are laid down in much the ſame way, *viz.* that he is *inviſible* †, one *whom no man hath ſeen, nor can ſee* ‡: neither hath any man *heard his voice at any time, nor ſeen his ſhape* ‖—and that, not being compounded of any *material diſſoluble* parts, he is of conſequence *immortal* §; and, upon the account of the peculiar and ineffable tranſcendency of his ſpiritual nature, and its neceſſary immutable exiſtence, it is further ſaid of him, that he *only hath immortality* †.

IT will be quite unneceſſary for me to add any thing more, in this place, beſides this one obſervation, that as GOD, in the doctrine of *revelation*, is in expreſs terms declared to be a *ſpirit*, it is impoſſible for any, beſides the moſt prejudiced or the moſt inconſiderate readers, to imagine, that when bodily parts and paſſions are ſeemingly aſcribed to him; when, in the lofty and poetical ſtile of the *Jewiſh* prophets, he is repreſented as having *eyes*, *ears*, *hands*, and the like; as *ſitting upon the circle of the earth*, and *riding upon the wings of the wind*; or as *loving*, *hating*, being *angry*, *repenting*, with other expreſſions of the ſame import—that any of theſe paſſages are to be underſtood in the groſs *literal* ſenſe, or as attributing to him any of the inſtincts, affections, and ſenſations of *animal* nature. But it is, on the contrary, moſt evident to the common ſenſe of mankind, that theſe figurative phraſes were only uſed to denote, in the ſtrongeſt manner, 'his ſupreme power 'and dominion, his majeſty and greatneſs, his command over 'univerſal nature, his omniſcience, and cloſe inſpection into the 'characters and actions of men; and his being always determined, 'by unalterable maxims of wiſdom, and even of goodneſs itſelf, 'to reward the righteous, and puniſh the incorrigibly wicked;

* Luke xxiv. 39. † 1 Tim. i. 17. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 16. ‖ John v. 37.
§ 1 Tim. i. 17. † 1 Tim. vi. 16.

'and,

'and, finally, to vary the courſe of his proceedings, as the moral 'ſtate of the world alters, as if he really *repented of the evil*, which 'he threatned to inflict on a corrupt and degenerate people.' All this is highly worthy of GOD, and neceſſarily ſprings from his unchangeable perfection, though, to make the deeper impreſſion upon the minds of men, theſe abſtracted and ſublime ideas are conveyed, by images that are more familiar to them, and better accommodated to the feelings and conceptions of the vulgar: For whom, as being generally the moſt debaſed, the moſt bewildered and loſt in error, divine revelation was principally intended.——Not to have ſaid thus much upon this ſubject might, perhaps, have been thought a defect; to offer more would be trifling with the underſtanding, and patience, of the reader.

I THEREFORE proceed to a more important inquiry, and that is, what religious uſes may be made of this attribute, the divine *ſpirituality*. And they are, chiefly, theſe two.

FIRST, That if GOD be a *ſpirit*, it muſt be a contradiction to his very nature, to attempt to deſcribe him by any *material* and *viſible ſimilitude*. If the degrading the Moſt High be *unfit* in itſelf, at all times and in all ſuppoſeable circumſtances, this *abuſe* muſt be abſolutely, and eternally, *immoral*. It is a heinous indignity offered to *him*, who is a pure and infinite *ſpirit*, as well as to the boundleſs wiſdom, the omnipotence, the immenſity, of the divine nature, to pretend to repreſent it, by what neceſſarily includes, in the very idea of it, *inactivity*, *groſs paſſion*, *imperfection*, and *limited exiſtence*. It tends to eraſe, from the minds of the bulk of mankind, all *rational* veneration of GOD; and to inſpire ſuch *low* and *carnal* apprehenſions concerning him, as muſt naturally terminate either in *profaneneſs*, or *ſuperſtition*. How much more

certainly, then, will this effect follow, from *worſhipping* the great GOD, who is a ſublime and incomprehenſible *ſpirit*, by *images*, as containing *ſymbolical repreſentations* of any of his perfections?

BUT, SECONDLY, The true and natural inference, to be drawn from this attribute, is thus pointed out to us by our bleſſed Saviour: *God is a ſpirit, and they, that worſhip him, muſt worſhip* him *in ſpirit and in truth* *. We may eaſily judge of the juſtneſs of this remark, from what we know, and experience, among ourſelves. The more any *man* is advanced in reaſon, the more he diſregards outward ſhow and oſtentation. *Angelical* natures may, therefore, be ſuppoſed to be ſtill more averſe to it; and GOD, the moſt perfect *intelligence*, to be abſolutely incapable of being, in the leaſt and moſt remote degree, impreſſed by it. 'He 'muſt therefore be worſhipped with the *underſtanding*, in oppo- 'ſition to *fancy* and *enthuſiaſm*; with *devotion* of *mind*, in oppo- 'ſition to *mere bodily ſervice*; with ſubſtantial and ſolid *piety*, in 'oppoſition to *ceremonious affectation*, and the mere *decorum* and 'order of an external *ritual*; and with *ſincerity* of heart, without 'any mixtures of *art*, and *diſſimulation*.' *This*, his being a ſimple unmixed intelligence neceſſarily demands from us, and, of conſequence, that we place the ſum of religion, *not* in ſpeculations and outward obſervances, *but* in purity of ſoul, and inviolable virtue and morality of life. This is, and will be to all eternity, the true religion, and the only acceptable worſhip of the DEITY; and was, indeed, the principal thing required, even under the *Jewiſh* diſpenſation, which, for wiſe reaſons, abounded, and was to a great degree burdened, with ceremonies. And, by making it an inference from the *ſpiritual* nature of GOD, *Chriſt* himſelf has plainly intimated, that it could *only* be concluded from his ſpirituality.

* John iv. 24.

For

For the whole of ſuperſtition, in its worſt extremes, has ſprang from mens ſubſtituting an '*animal*, in the ſtead of a ſpiritual 'DEITY; a GOD of *inſtinct* and *paſſion*, in the place of one, of 'abſolute and infinite wiſdom.'

I SHALL only obſerve farther, that though our idea of a ſpirit be not entirely *negative*, but includes, in it, the *poſitive* qualities of *intelligence* and *activity*, yet theſe, in ſtrict propriety, can only be mentioned, in general, *here*; and the conſideration of them, in the degree in which GOD poſſeſſes them, falls under the heads of his *knowledge* and *power*: to which, therefore, I chuſe to refer it.

As for the *omnipreſence*, and the *immenſity*, of GOD, though they have been generally confounded, and blended together, as the ſelf-ſame ſubject, they are really, in nature, *diſtinct*. Omnipreſence only denotes the *real preſence* of the DEITY, with *all* things *actually exiſting*: Immenſity denotes, that he exiſts in all the extramundane ſpaces, beyond the utmoſt orbit of the univerſe; which *ſpaces*, filled by nothing but the *exiſtence* of mere DEITY, are ſuppoſed to be *infinite*. So that omnipreſence is a *confined*, immenſity a *boundleſs* and *unlimitable* ſubject. Religion, however, is almoſt wholely confined to the conſideration of the *omnipreſence* of GOD, and has but very little to do with the abſtract idea of *immenſe exiſtence*, and for this obvious reaſon; becauſe if it be once admitted, that he is *always*, and *intimately*, *preſent* with *every* part of the *real univerſe* of beings, his being infinitely expanded, beyond the utmoſt bounds of all worlds, may be a real truth, but can ſcarce be deemed a neceſſary practical truth. The *firſt* muſt be aſſented to, as the baſis of univerſal religion; it is more obvious and demonſtrable to all mankind, whom it is the buſineſs of religion

gion to perſuade and influence; the other is of a more abſtruſe nature, and therefore not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, eſſential: and that for this additional reaſon, becauſe a preſiding and active *providence* is ſufficiently eſtabliſhed, over *all* things that *are*, by the above-mentioned notion of omnipreſence *alone*, and, conſequently, the moſt ſubſtantial motives, to offices of virtue and piety, retain their utmoſt force and energy. I ſhall, therefore, firſt ſet myſelf to prove the *omnipreſence* of GOD, and, from thence, endeavour to riſe to the proofs of his *immenſity*: which will enlarge our ideas, and, by augmenting the dignity and majeſty of GOD in their inward conceptions, enforce the reverence and duty of his creatures, and ſubjects.

THAT GOD created *this globe*, and *all other worlds*, is a principle admitted in the preſent argument: or if it was not, it has been already demonſtrated, in the proofs given of an eternal *Firſt Cauſe* of all limited and dependent beings. And, from hence, it neceſſarily follows, that he muſt exiſt *every-where*, where *any part* of his own creation exiſts, at leaſt, as to the *influences* of his knowledge, wiſdom, and activity; and, indeed, how he ſhould either *know*, or *act*, where he is not ſubſtantially preſent, is, I think, impoſſible to be conceived. His eſſential being, therefore, if it was *once* co-exiſtent with the univerſe (as this argument ſeems undeniably to prove) muſt continue *immutably* ſo: and there can need no other evidence of the *paſt*, and *preſent*, and *future*, and *eternal omnipreſence* of the DEITY. We may however add, that the principle of *gravitation*, which is a law that obtains in all matter, and what unites and holds together the vaſt fabric of the material world, as it cannot be accounted for from any *mechanical* powers known in nature, and ſuppoſes therefore an *active power*, not affecting merely the *ſurfaces*, but penetrating to the very *center* of material beings, and diffuſed

diffuſed throughout the *whole ſyſtem*; this wonderful principle, I ſay, affords not only the cleareſt evidence of the *attribute* of GOD, which we are now conſidering, but alſo, a ſtrong preſumption of his *immediate interpoſition*, and *influence*, in ſupporting the frame and order of the material world, in every part, and inſtant, of its duration.

FROM diſcourſing of the *omnipreſence*, I proceed to conſider the *immenſity*, of GOD: which implies in it, in general (as I have before obſerved)—that there are no bounds to his eſſence and activity, as there muſt be, for ever, to the utmoſt poſſible ſcope of the creation; or, that they are not circumſcribed within the limits of nature produced, or that ever will be produced, but extend to an abſolute infinity.

OF this *immenſe* being of the DEITY, we may form ſome imperfect idea thus—Let us imagine the *actual ſyſtem* of nature to be ever ſo *large*, and of ever ſuch vaſt *dimenſions*, we muſt ſtill have an idea of *void ſpaces*, or of *room* left for the *creation* of *more* worlds. If we carry our thoughts ever ſo *far*, this idea will ſtill remain. Of conſequence, therefore, we have a *natural* notion, not to be eradicated from the human mind, of a power of creating (if it were poſſible it ſhould be actually exerted) even to *infinity* itſelf; and, conſequently, of *immenſity* of being, in the eternal cauſe, or author, of all derived exiſtence. And the unavoidable conſequence of this is, that there *can* be *no* demonſtration *againſt* the *immenſity* of GOD. And this is a very important point gained, becauſe now it certainly appears, that if any demonſtrative proof can be produced, it muſt lie entirely on that ſide of the queſtion, which I have undertaken to defend; or, elſe, if ſuch abſolutely deciſive proof cannot be expected, in a controverſy of this nature

(where the thing itſelf, in debate, is ſo extremely remote from all human adequate conception), then the greateſt apparent probabilities muſt determine, and fix, our judgment. And to point out plainly what theſe are, and to which branch of the argument they are moſt properly aſſigned, I would only deſire, that the following things may be impartially conſidered.

FIRST, That the *omnipreſence* of the DEITY being proved, the *atheiſt* himſelf can have no ground or foundation, upon which to raiſe an objection againſt his *immenſity*; ſince the *firſt*, as to all the purpoſes of providence and moral government, is exactly and effectually the *ſame*. All nature, and all poſſible conſequences of things actually exiſting, are equally included in the *one*, as in the *other*. And the idea of *immenſity* has ſeemed ſo connatural to *eternal* and *ſelf-exiſtent* being, that even the *materialiſts* themſelves, and the pleaders for no GOD beſides the *univerſe*, have generally been diſpoſed to admit it.

BUT to proceed one ſtep further—If the *preſence* of the DEITY, and conſequently his *eſſence*, be neceſſarily confined to the *actual* frame and conſtitution of the world, it muſt then be impoſſible, and a contradiction to ſome common and certain principle of reaſon, that he ſhould create *new* worlds. But this all mankind, upon a ſuppoſition that GOD exiſts, as this argument allows, will immediately reject as wild and romantic; becauſe his power and wiſdom muſt *always* be adequate to his producing *ſuch* effects, as he has *already* produced. And, beſides, we cannot poſſibly aſſign (I think) the leaſt colour of reaſon, why the eſſence and operations of GOD ſhould be thus *limited*: or why *he* whoſe being is ſo *vaſtly* extended, as to pervade the unmeaſurable parts of *ſpace*, in which the univerſal

univerſal creation actually ſubſiſts, may not alſo be *infinitely* diffuſed, and his being and preſence abſolutely *illimitable*.

BESIDES a very probable argument, highly and unanſwerably probable (though I will not take upon me to ſay, that it is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, demonſtrative) for the *immenſity* of GOD, may be deduced from his *neceſſary exiſtence*. For neceſſary being, in every juſt and rational idea we can form of it, has no more relation to *place*, than it has to *time*. In our firſt conceptions of it, it extends equally to *all* ſpace, and to *all* duration. And reaſon ſeems greatly to corroborate this firſt common apprehenſion: for whatever does not neceſſarily exiſt in any *one* part of ſpace, we cannot eaſily conceive ſhould exiſt neceſſarily in any *other*. So that if the great and original Being does not fill *all ſpace*, the very idea of neceſſary exiſtence (which has been already confirmed by the ſtrongeſt proofs) muſt be perplexed and confounded. And it is altogether as eaſy to imagine, that GOD ſhould exiſt in the *infinite* expanſions of ſpace, by all, unleſs by *himſelf*, uninhabited, as that he ſhould have from *eternity* exiſted *alone*, in *limited* ſpaces, before any worlds were created.

SHOULD it be ſaid, that if the Divine Being be infinitely diffuſed through all ſpace, there being no vacuum, he muſt be neceſſarily and eternally *immoveable*; and, conſequently, that he could not be the *firſt beginner* of *motion*, as it is a property not inherent in himſelf: I anſwer, that as we argue, *here*, only from the properties of *material* beings, we cannot poſſibly infer from hence (as *immaterial* are of directly oppoſite qualities) that an infinitely extended *ſpirit* excludes the *poſſibility* of its own *motion*, as would the infinite extenſion of *matter*. But if it did, an immoveable ſpirit might be the firſt *ſource* of derived and dependent *motion*, as eaſily, as an

immaterial principle could produce a *material* one, or an underſtanding principle things quite *unintelligent*. The latter has been already ſhewn to be *fact*, and, therefore, the former muſt be, at leaſt, *poſſible*.

I KNOW now of no remaining objection, againſt either the *omnipreſence*, or the *immenſity*, of GOD but this—that then he muſt be always *preſent* in the baſeſt ſcenes both of *material* defilement, and *moral* impurity. But this (though treated as an objection by ſome of the greateſt writers on this ſubject, that I have ever ſeen) I think ſo entirely below my notice, and the attention of any grave and ſober reader, that I ſhall only anſwer to it, what, I am ſurpriſed, has not been oftner thought of; *viz.* that it may exclude GOD's *exiſtence*, and even the *poſſibility* of his exiſtence, *univerſally*: becauſe there is *no one* determinate part of ſpace, in which the groſſeſt moral impurities, at leaſt, are not capable of being acted. So that this, if it concludes any thing at all, muſt conclude, contrary to the intention of the objector, againſt the *being* of a GOD; and, in all other lights, it is abſolutely, and moſt extremely, deſpicable. It being therefore an exception, if rightly urged, to nothing, but what is a plain and ſtrong demonſtration, to let it drop, without a more ample diſplay of its abſurdity, is ſhowing it more favour, than it can in juſtice claim.

WHAT might be offered further upon this ſubject, I reſerve for the concluſion of the next chapter: Which treats

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

Of the Omniſcience *of* GOD.

WE are now in courſe to conſider, and, as far as the narrow reach of human reaſon will allow, to illuſtrate the *omniſcience* of GOD; which is the firſt ſpring and eſſential fountain (in all, and in every ſingle individual part, of the univerſe) of exiſtence, life, and ſpirit, of order, beauty, and uſe. *Knowledge* is the foundation of *wiſdom*, and *wiſdom* of all juſt and great *deſign*. An *unintelligent* firſt cauſe even of inanimate being, it has been already ſhewn, can ſcarce be ſo far admitted in ſpeculation, as to be made the ground of a fictitious argument, or an argument on ſuppoſition only, with the leaſt appearance, or face, of probability. For *neceſſity*, and *chance*, can account for nothing; neither for the minuteſt exiſtence, nor the moſt trivial event; neither for the various *regularity*, nor the uniform and conſtant *diverſity*, in the conſtitution and frame of nature. And an *unintelligent* cauſe of innumerable *different underſtandings*, endowed with innumerable *different powers* (as to *degree* at leaſt) of reflection and judgment, muſt be a ſtill more conſpicuous, and eminent, ſtrain of abſurdity; as it is indeed, in terms, a contradiction. Upon this groſs ſuppoſition, the very idea of creation is abſurd, *i. e.* in other words, there could be neither *cauſe*, nor *effect*, but an univerſal eternal *blank* and *vacuity* of being.

OR if we could get over the impoſſibility, as to being in general, could there be the moſt admirable and unvaried harmony without *wiſdom*, or wiſdom without *knowledge?* Could there be juſtice, or goodneſs, or any moral character, without *intelligence?* Could there be any mutual *correſpondencies* of things, or any equal *proportions* maintained upon the whole? Could there be a *providence* exerciſed over the creation in general, or any *government* over mankind? No! the *material* world muſt be dark, ſpiritleſs, and ſubject to infinite incomprehenſible irregularities; and the *moral* without direction, or defence. The idea, therefore, of an *omniſcient* ſuperintendency and rule, if compared with that of *no* informing and preſiding intellect, or of a ſupreme force in nature of *imperfect* and *limited* comprehenſion, ſtands in exactly the ſame eſtimate, as light, to darkneſs, order, to confuſion, regular adminiſtration upon the whole, to wild unlimited anarchy throughout the utmoſt extent of human being; and, as a diſcerning and diſcriminating juſtice, to an uncontroulable promiſcuous fate, perhaps of miſery, in which all may be equally involved.

I MENTION theſe things, not as *proofs* of the *omniſcience* of the DEITY (though they are plain and ſtrong indications of an *intelligent* authority, and ſuperintending direction and government of the vaſt collective ſyſtem of inferior beings) but only to ſhew, to what a high degree, the attribute of infinite knowledge is deſireable; that, for a man to be prejudiced againſt it, would be to oppoſe the good of the creation, and, blindly, to act the part of a moſt cruel enemy againſt himſelf; and that he ought, therefore, to ſtrip himſelf bare of all prejudice, and attend to the reaſons of the caſe ſolemnly and impartially, both from ſelf-intereſt, and the more abſtracted, and refined, motives of equity and honour.

THE term *infinite*, being taken originally from *duration* and *ſpace*, to which it moſt ſtrictly belongs, and applied to *attributes* of *mind*, and *moral characters*, denotes no more, than *abſolute* excellence in its kind, or the *higheſt poſſible* perfection. And thus, particularly, *knowledge* may be ſaid to be *infinite*, when 'it has no 'other *bounds*, than the natural *poſſibilities* of things:' or, in other words, when 'it reaches to, perceives with a clear infallible cer-'tainty, and thoroughly comprehends, *all ſubjects* that are *capable* 'of being *known*.' It neither implies, that 'the objects of the 'divine intelligence, that have a *real* being, are, in number, infi-'nite;' nor, even, that 'the *poſſibilities* of being are infinite.'

THESE are vain curioſities, fruitleſs, and deſtitute of all ſolid advantages, if they could be diſtinctly fixed; but vaſtly beyond the utmoſt powers of human reaſon, and perhaps of any created underſtanding, how ſublime and expanded ſoever, to form an adequate idea of. Without loſing ourſelves, therefore, in darkneſs and confuſion, by attempting to penetrate into things unfathomable, let us adhere to the definition already given, which deſcribes an attribute, or perfection, of the firſt ſupreme mind, which we can, in general, conceive *may be*; and which we may juſtly, without being charged either with folly, or raſh preſumption, undertake to *prove*; becauſe it is, in all the *terms* of it, *obvious*, and fully *intelligible*. For no propoſition can be clearer, where there are the loweſt capacities of reaſoning, than this—that the great DEITY, the fountain of all intelligence, 'is intimately and completely ac-'quainted with whatever *does*, or *can*, exiſt; with whatever *is*, 'or *can be*, true, with reſpect to all beings, and all modes, or 'properties, of being.' If we reſt here, our underſtandings will go along with us, and aſſiſt us in every ſtep: if we endeavour to launch

launch out farther into the ſubject, and to comprehend the *manner* of the divine *omniſcience*, ſo infinitely remote from the utmoſt ſtretch of our circumſcribed and ſcanty faculties, our own weakneſs, and childiſh imaginations, will throw clouds and darkneſs all around us, and run us into endleſs mazes.

MAN indeed, from his own experience, and the operations of his own mental powers, can ſcarce riſe to the leaſt *diſtinct* and *poſitive* conception of the *way*, in which the infinite underſtanding of GOD diſcerns the moſt minute parts of nature, or perceives any ſingle event; and, much leſs, how it takes in, at once, the vaſt expanſe of the creation, and, at one view, infallibly comprehends all truth: becauſe as our knowledge is, itſelf, indiſtinct and partial, and, with reſpect to its compaſs, very narrow and confined (and, therefore, all the properties of it have imperfection neceſſarily attending them, inſcribed in legible characters, and comprehended in their very nature) it can, of conſequence, furniſh no *direct* and *juſt* idea of a knowledge, which is abſolutely without defect; which is conſummate, and of a ſingular tranſcendency; and, by the omnipotent power of the DEITY himſelf, incommunicable to finite natures. And as mankind are not, in particular, thoroughly acquainted with the utmoſt *poſſible* ſcope of the capacities of the *human* nature, they can never hope to attain to ſuch heights of reaſon, as to be able, with tolerable exactneſs, to explain, and deſcribe, the infinite underſtanding of the *divine*. For, to ſum up the whole, *their* acquiſitions of knowledge are ſlow and laborious; *thoſe* of the DEITY eaſy, quick, and inſtantaneous—*their* knowledge is, for the moſt part, probability, frequently, only conjecture, almoſt always, inadequate; *his* is full, certain, and infallible—*theirs* is ſuperficial; *his* pierces into the hidden retired eſſences of things, and the original principles of their com-

poſition—*theirs* is chiefly formed by a train of conſequences, and a deduction of ſome things from others; *his* is immediate, and intuitive—*theirs*, in its higheſt pitch, is attended with ſuch impediments and obſcurities, as are always ſufficient to check human vanity and pride; *his* is unclouded, and univerſal, light—*their* portion of knowledge, ſmall as it is, is improved, or diminiſhed, with age, opportunities for inquiry, and according to the degree of diligence, and application, in the examiner; *his* was perfect from eternity, is inſeparable from his being, and muſt continue, immutably the ſame, for ever.

BY conſidering, therefore, what paſſes within *ourſelves*, we learn little more, than that the *wonderful ways*, of *him* who is *perfect in knowledge*, are by *us* inſcrutable; little more, than that we ought to worſhip and adore, and lay all our boaſted faculties of reaſon proſtrate before his omniſcience: acknowledging, that though human intelligence be a *ray* and *emanation* from his original ſupreme intelligence, yet that *our method* of perceiving, and knowing, things ſcarce bears any *reſemblance* of *his*; that we muſt deny *his knowledge* to be, in almoſt all reſpects, what the operations of *human underſtanding* are; and can then only entertain worthy and reſpectable ſentiments, though not proportioned to the ſubject, when we remove the *divine omniſcience*, as far as poſſible, from every thing, which we *feel* in *our own minds*.

THERE is nothing, in our preſent powers of underſtanding, that can afford the moſt diſtant conception of GOD's clear and certain intelligence, but the diſtinct and infallible perception, which we have, of *our own ideas*, and our intuitive knowledge of *ſelf-evident truths*. Theſe, as far as finite can poſſibly delineate, and ſhadow out, infinite, may give us ſome kind of faint, and imperfect,

idea of the divine penetration into the cloſeſt receſſes of nature, and comprehending for ever, and at one view, all poſſible objects of knowledge. But what a *mean* and *lame* reſemblance is this—of the *univerſal* clearneſs and infallibility of the *Divine* intellect, *equally* extended to *all* ſubjects, that, with reſpect to us, are imaginary, probable, demonſtrable, or ſelf-evident? What a *more* imperfect reſemblance does it ſtill yield—of his *infinite* knowledge, uniformly diffuſed throughout all exiſting nature; enlightening, and perceiving as diſtinctly as if they were actually preſent, remote and dark *futurities*; and giving a kind of real being (as *determinate* in the divine idea, as if they had, *indeed*, a real being) to all *poſſible* events!

HOWEVER, not to diſcourage our rational and humble inquiries, I would now add, that we have the utmoſt reaſon to *believe* the *attribute*, of *omniſcience*, itſelf to be eſſential to the DEITY, as well as that of *omnipotence*, though the *mode* of both be incomprehenſible. 'The *thing*, and not the *manner* of it, is what reaſon 'and religion oblige us to believe.' Of the *firſt* we have *an idea*, and, therefore, may juſtly *aſſent* to it: of the *latter* we have *no conception*, and, therefore, can poſſibly frame *no propoſition* concerning it, as a neceſſary article or point of faith. Let us ſee, then, how the general doctrine, of GOD's *omniſcience*, may be made obvious and certain to human reaſon.

IT has been already obſerved, that the firſt cauſe and fountain of being muſt be poſſeſſed of *intelligence*, both becauſe, an *unintelligent* principle cannot, in the nature of things, be admitted as *a cauſe*; and becauſe, *thought* and *reflection* are among the *effects* produced. And we may argue farther, 'that the voluntary cauſe 'of the univerſe, now exiſting, muſt have ſuch a *degree* and *ex-* 'tent of *knowledge*, as is *proportionable* to the univerſal ſyſtem and 'chain

'chain of effects *actually* produced, and, hereafter, *poſſible* to be 'produced, in conſequence of the original conſtitution.' As, therefore, the ſyſtem of *actual* creation is of vaſt compaſs, and exquiſite beauty; of unblemiſhed order, and moſt admirable uſes; and one tendency to good is preſerved, and maintained, through the whole; the *intelligence*, enlivening and actuating the whole, muſt be allowed to be of *indeterminable extent*, becauſe the utmoſt limits of creation are *unknown:* and, in what *appears*, human reaſon is utterly unable to unravel the wonders of the moſt common, ſeemingly trifling, and deſpicable objects: it muſt acknowledge the ſkill and curious art, diſplayed in the minuteſt inſect to be *admirable*, and may, therefore, juſtly preſume the ſagacity and contrivance, in the entire collection of beings, to be *infinite*. This argument, though it directly relates to the diſplays of GOD's *wiſdom*, muſt be equally applicable to his *knowledge*, becauſe theſe *two* differ no otherwiſe, than as the *application* of ſpeculative principles differs from the *principles* themſelves; and '*wiſdom*, in the conſtruction and government of the world, can 'never appear, but where *knowledge*, as the neceſſary foundation, 'is *equal* to it.'

STILL it may be ſaid, that this only proves the DEITY to be poſſeſſed of a *wonderful* and *incomprehenſible* underſtanding, but is not an argument, that he is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, *omniſcient*. I anſwer, that, if what has been already ſuggeſted be not an abſolute demonſtration, it muſt, however, be allowed to be next to a demonſtration; becauſe that great Being, who has *ſufficient knowledge* to *create*, and *maintain* conſtantly and uninterruptedly, the *frame* and *order* of the *preſent* univerſe, can ſcarce be denied ſuch *degrees* of *intelligence*, as are ſufficient to bring, into being, infinite *other* worlds. And if it be farther ſhewn, that he muſt com-

prehend all the *paſt*, all the *preſent*, and all *poſſible futurities*; then the idea and belief of his omniſcience, in the moſt proper and capacious ſenſe of the word, muſt be proved beyond all reaſonable exception. This, therefore, I ſhall attempt briefly to illuſtrate; but reſerving myſelf, chiefly, for the *Divine preſcience*, or *knowledge* of *future events*; becauſe, all the other branches, of the argument, coincide ſo generally with the ſenſe of mankind, and are, in their own nature, of ſuch obvious certainty, that they require no laboured, or copious, diſcuſſion.

AND, FIRST, As to the *preſent actual ſtate* of things, it can hardly be doubted, but that *this* is moſt completely, moſt minutely, and circumſtantially ſubject to the *Divine* and infallible *knowledge*. For GOD is the *creator* of all; and therefore muſt be thoroughly *acquainted* with the boundaries, with the determinate extent and force, of the *powers*, which he himſelf *produced*, and with all their *poſſible* methods of operation; and being intimately *near* to, and eſſentially *preſent* with, all created nature, it is impoſſible, that any thing, which *is*, ſhould, in any ſucceſſive moment of duration, be *concealed* from him, who is perfect life, and pure, uninterrupted, unſuſpended *intellect*. The *operations* of the human mind, and, conſequently, all its *thoughts* and *purpoſes*, muſt be as plainly expoſed to his view, as the *effects*, and *internal compounding principles*, of material ſubſtances. His eternal omnipreſent ſpirit pervades *both* every-where; and therefore muſt be preſent to all exerciſes of *thought*, as well as to all motions and operations of *matter*.

AGAIN, SECONDLY, As to the *paſt*, there can be no difficulty of acknowledging the *Divine* omniſcience: becauſe we find forgetfulneſs, in *men*, to be more owing to an indolent habit, or to ſome

ſome accidental diſorders in the animal frame; than to the want of an innate *proportionable* force, in the mind, to *recollect* itſelf, and the memory of *paſt* tranſactions. An underſtanding, therefore, never dormant, never crampt and confined, never varying from itſelf, always attentive to the univerſal ſituation and circumſtance of being, from the beginning to the conſummation of things, and having a capacity, infinitely more than adequate, to the comprehenſion of all limited effects, cannot be ſuppoſed, without the moſt palpable abſurdity, to be ignorant of the *paſt*, any more than of the *preſent*; but muſt eternally perceive and diſcern *both*, with the ſame infallible exactneſs.

AND as GOD knows, determinately and fully, all that *has been*, and all that *is*, he muſt, alſo, diſtinctly comprehend all the *poſſibilities* of things; becauſe, in order to this, nothing more is neceſſary, than the 'being thoroughly acquainted with his own being, 'and the *extent* of his own *power*. And as we ourſelves, dull and ſhort-ſighted as we are, can in a general way define, and fix, the *limits* of human activity, to deny, to the firſt and ſupreme intelligence, the perfect knowledge of *himſelf*, and of the entire *ſcope* of his *eſſential operations*, muſt be as abſurd to reaſon, as it is impious and irreverent to the DEITY.

THERE now, then, only remains to be conſidered—GOD's knowledge of *futurities*. And of his infallible foreſight of the *neceſſary* effects of *neceſſary* cauſes, there can be no reaſonable ground to doubt in *general*—not only, becauſe theſe are ſure and inevitable conſequences; but as 'the *effects*, neceſſarily produced, are as much 'his *intended* frame and conſtitution of nature, as the *cauſes* neceſ-'ſarily producing.' I ſay, there can be no reaſon to doubt of this in *general*; becauſe there may poſſibly happen, and, upon the ſuppoſition

poſition of *contingencies*, there muſt and will happen, ſome *exempt* and *peculiar* caſes. For, whenever, 'natural and mechanical 'cauſes are *voluntarily*, and *freely*, directed by man, or any other 'ſubordinate agent, the mechanical, and in themſelves *neceſſary*, 'effects of ſuch cauſes can no *otherwiſe* be known, than as the 'voluntary, and *free*, *determinations* of men may, *alſo*, be known.' This diſtinction, the writers upon this ſubject have, as far as I remember, ſeldom made, but have aſſigned *all* natural effects, of natural cauſes, to the ſame claſs indiſcriminately; though it appears, that thoſe, which I have mentioned, are in no other way to be foreknown, than as 'the moſt *abſolute contingencies* may be 'foreknown.' However, I need to inſiſt no longer on this; becauſe the juſt ſtate of the argument, with reſpect to *contingencies* themſelves, will remove every *other* difficulty, every *other* objection, that is grafted upon, and connected with, it.

THE very idea, of a *contingent* event, preſuppoſes *liberty*; and, therefore, I ſhall not ſtate the queſtion thus—'Whether *preſcience* 'be conſiſtent with the *freedom* of human actions?' but—'whether, and in what way, *contingent* events can poſſibly be *fore*-'*known*?' Which method of proceeding, by ſhowing, 'how far '*preſcience* is reconcileable to *contingency*,' will alſo ſhow with exactly equal evidence, 'how far it is conſiſtent with *liberty*.' As I would proceed with modeſty, and a becoming reverence, in all inquiries concerning the perfections of GOD, and eſpecially in thoſe points, about which men of learning, and the deepeſt reflection, have been divided in their ſentiments, I ſhall not *directly* eſpouſe, nor appear as a *profeſſed* advocate for, any opinion; but, with all the impartiality of which I am capable, propoſe the ſtrength and weight of the argument, on *both* ſides of the queſtion. And, here, the firſt place (as they are the moſt numerous, and maintain the

moſt popular ſide of the argument) ſhall be given to the *defenders* of GOD's *certain* and *infallible preſcience* of events, that are allowed, by both parties, to be in themſelves *contingent:* For, with the pleader for an univerſal *neceſſity*, or with the ſtrict *predeſtinarian*, we have, now, no manner of concern; becauſe both their ſchemes renounce the *liberty* of human actions, and, of conſequence, all *poſſibility* of *contingent* events. To proceed, then, in the order which I firſt propoſed——The believer, in a ſtrict *infallible preſcience* of all *contingent futurities*, urges, in the FIRST place,-'that 'it ſeems unworthy the infinite wiſdom of the DEITY, to put ſuch 'a multitude of *events* (as *contingencies* muſt be, if not *foreknown*) 'quite out of the *reach* of his foreſight.' To which it is anſwered,—that 'it can ſignify nothing at all, if they ſhould be out of the 'reach of his far *remote*, and *diſtant*, foreſight, becauſe *no* conſequences at all can follow, till the things themſelves *actually* 'exiſt; and, before they *really* exiſt, there muſt be a *preſent* intention and determination of the *free* being, that they ſhould be 'brought into exiſtence: which intention, GOD, who infallibly 'knows all things that *are*, muſt of neceſſity be acquainted with; 'and may therefore either, by his infinite power, prevent the *action* itſelf, or, by a ſecret influence upon the mind, alter, or ſuſpend, the *reſolution* to act. And there is no objection againſt 'ſuppoſing this, becauſe the *moral* character of the *free* being is 'entirely ſtated, and fixed, by his *determination* to act, whether 'real external *agency* be the conſequence, or not. And beſides 'infinite power, in conjunction with omniſcience, always *attentive* to the *preſent* ſtate of things, may eaſily regulate the *whole*; 'and prevent any *general* miſchiefs, which might reſult from the 'irregular *deſigns* of all inferior beings, of limited activity, whether 'previouſly *known* or *unknown*.'

IT is FURTHER urged—that 'whatever is *future* is *certainly* 'and *infallibly* future: *i. e.* if I, or any other man, have *this day*, 'for inſtance, performed a certain action, it was *true* from *eter-* 'nity, that ſuch a determinate action would, at *that inſtant*, com- 'mence.' But to this it is replied—that 'if the action *might*, or 'might *not* be, it could *not* be true from eternity, that it would 'certainly be; but that it could only be true, of two *contrary* 'events both equally *poſſible*, that *one*, or *other*, of them, would 'ſurely happen, and not that *either* would be, infallibly, a fact: 'becauſe the other, then, could not *poſſibly* be, contrary to the very 'notion of *contingency*, by both parties allowed.'

It is alledged, THIRDLY—that '*preſcience* has no more influence 'on the *future*, than *preſent knowledge* has on the *actual*, exiſt- 'ence of things.' This muſt be univerſally admitted. But ſtill it will be ſaid—that 'though preſcience does not *cauſe*, it evidently 'preſuppoſes, the neceſſary futurity of things; becauſe what is *cer-* 'tainly foreknown muſt, in its natural cauſes, be *certain*, what is 'neceſſarily foreknown muſt, in its immediate cauſes, be a *neceſſary* 'event: and it is, *merely*, the *neceſſity* of the action (which all *ab-* 'ſolute and *infallible* preſcience implies, in the very idea of it) that 'is repugnant to *contingency*; whatever be the *principle*, or *ſource*, 'of this neceſſity.' Theſe are the moſt important arguments offer- ed, in *defence* of a ſtrict and immutable *foreknowledge*.

THE reaſoning, on the other ſide, is to this effect—that '*infal-* 'lible *preſcience*, and *contingent events*, are contrary and ſelf-repug- 'nant terms. For a *contingent* effect is what either *may*, or *may* 'not, be; but its being *infallibly* foreknown ſuppoſes, that it *cer-* 'tainly *will* be; and therefore, that its *not being* is a *contradiction*.

'If it *may not ever* be an actual event, that underſtanding may poſ-
'ſibly err, which fixes it as *certain*; and, conſequently, the infal-
'lible *foreknowledge* of what is not infallibly *future* (as every thing,
'that *may never* happen, plainly *is not*) muſt be ranked among
'the things, that are, in nature, *impoſſible*.' To this it is objected,
—that 'GOD knows things in a manner *tranſcendent* and *incompre-*
'*henſible*.' And it is anſwered—that the preſent queſtion is not
'about the *manner* of GOD's comprehending objects;' but 'whe-
'ther the *object* of knowledge be, in itſelf, poſſible.' Should it be
further urged, that the opinion, which I am now repreſenting,
'ſuppoſes GOD to receive, daily, new *acceſſions* to his *knowledge*;
'which leſſens the glory of his *omniſcience*, and aſcribes great im-
'perfection to him.' To this it will be replied—'not the *leaſt de-*
'*gree* of *imperfection*, if the thing in debate be, in itſelf, a *con-*
'*tradiction*, which is the point, on which the whole argument
'turns. For it is the utmoſt *extent*, even of *infinite knowledge*,
'to comprehend all the *poſſibilities* of things:' whatever goes be-
yond theſe is, in truth, *nothing*; and, of conſequence, neither an
object of *knowledge*, or *power*.

AND, FINALLY, The diſbeliever of a ſtrict *infallible preſcience*
will be apt to plead for himſelf, 'that he does not intend, abſo-
'lutely, to deny *all foreknowledge* even of the contingent actions
'of free beings; but can acquieſce (though the *former* appears to
'him to be impoſſible) in the illuſtration given of the *latter*
'by a great and moſt judicious writer—*viz.* that "as a *man*, who
"has no influence over another perſon's actions, can yet often per-
"ceive before-hand what that other will do; and a *wiſer*, and
"more experienced, man will ſtill, with *greater probability*, fore-
"ſee what another, whoſe diſpoſition he is perfectly acquainted
"with, will in certain circumſtances do; and an *angel*, with ſtill

" much *leſs degrees* of *error*, may have a *further* proſpect into " mens future actions: ſo it is very reaſonable to apprehend, that " GOD, without influencing mens wills by his power, yet, by his " foreſight, cannot but have as much *certainer* a knowledge (meaning as much *higher a degree* of what is called *moral certainty*, as the nature and courſe of the *illuſtration* ſeems to intimate, and require that it ſhould be underſtood) " of future free events, than " either men or angels can poſſibly have; as the *perfection* of *his* " nature is greater than that of *theirs* *." And, upon allowing *this kind* of *foreknowledge*, in the *higheſt degree* to which it is in nature capable of being extended, the objector to *certain infallible preſcience* is inclined to think, ' that *ſcripture-prophecies* will be ' fully ſupported; and, under the conduct of an almighty provi- ' dence, diſpoſing and regulating *all events*, have all the *weight* ' that can juſtly be deſired.'

I SHALL conclude this head (leaving ſo abſtruſe and intricate a ſubject, as it has *now* been, in general, ſtated on *both* ſides of the queſtion) with another paſſage of the author above-mentioned. ' If theſe two things [liberty, and preſcience] were *really incon-* ' *ſiſtent*, and one of them muſt be deſtroyed; the introducing an ' abſolute and univerſal fatality, which evidently deſtroys all reli- ' gion and morality, would tend more of the two to the diſhonour ' of GOD, than the denying him a foreknowledge, which, upon ' this ſuppoſition, would be impoſſible, and imply a contradiction ' to conceive him to have: and the denying which would, in ſuch ' caſe, be no more a diminution of his *omniſcience*, than the deny- ' ing him the power, of working contradictions, is taking away ' his *omnipotence* †.

* Dr. S. Clarke's *Demonſtration*, &c. p. 102. 7th edit. † Idem, ibid.

AND

AND with reſpect to the two momentous doctrines of the *omni-preſence*, and *omniſcience*, of GOD, which are inſeparably connected together; the ſenſe of *revelation* is expreſſed in the ſtrongeſt and moſt capacious terms. He is not only repreſented—as *not* being *far from every one of us* [a]; but as *filling heaven and earth* [b]; nay, *the heaven, and heaven of heavens, cannot contain* him [c].—*He is perfect in knowledge* [d], and *his underſtanding* is *infinite* [e].—*Known unto* GOD *are all his works, from the beginning of the world* [f]. —*The eyes of the* LORD are *in every place* [g]: *He looketh to the ends of the earth*, and *ſeeth under the whole heaven* [h].—*He that planted the ear, ſhall not he hear? He that formed the eye, ſhall not he ſee? He that teacheth man knowledge*, ſhall not he know [i]? Yea, the LORD is *a* GOD *of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed* [k]. *From the place of his habitation, he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth* [l].—He declareth *the former things* [m], and ſheweth *things which muſt be hereafter* [n]. He declareth *the end, from the beginning*, and, *from antient times*, the things *that are not yet done* [o]. He *revealeth ſecrets, and maketh known what ſhall be in the latter day* [p]. *The* LORD *ſearcheth all hearts, and underſtandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts* [q]. He knoweth *the things that come into* our *mind, every one of them*. *And no thought can be with-holden from* him [s]. What a grand and magnificent deſcription is this! how complete and inſtructive! and agreeable, in every part, to the wiſeſt apprehenſions of mankind!

[a] Acts xvii. 27. [b] Jer. xxiii. 24. [c] 1 Kings viii. 27. [d] Job xxxvi. 4. [e] Pſ. cxlvii. 5. [f] Acts xv. 18. [g] Prov. xv. 3. [h] Job xxviii. 24. [i] Pſ. xciv. 9, 10. [k] 1 Sam. ii. 3. [l] Pſ. xxxiii. 14. [m] Iſ. xlviii. 3. [n] Rev. iv. 1. [o] Iſ. xlvi. 10. [p] Dan. ii. 28. [q] 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. [r] Ezek. xi. 5. [s] Job xlii. 2.

BUT there is a peculiar beauty and ſublimity, in the repreſentation made of theſe attributes in the 139th *Pſalm*, which deſerves to be particularly conſidered. It begins with a devout contemplation of the *omniſcience* of GOD; not indeed *expreſsly* celebrated in its *utmoſt extent*, as it penetrates at once, with an exact and infallible comprehenſion, through the whole ſcope of created nature, and reaches to the utmoſt verge and limits of the univerſe, nor as, together with the preſent ſyſtem, and complete actual ſtate of things, it has an intuitive and clear view of the paſt, and perceives the moſt obſcure and remote futurities, and all poſſible natures and modes of exiſtence; but as it *particularly* reſpects *mankind*, more immediately influences *human morality*, and the ſerious humble diſcharge of all the duties of *religion*——*O* LORD (ſays the *Pſalmiſt*, in a moſt elevated ſtrain of thought and expreſſion) *thou haſt ſearched me, and known me. Thou knoweſt my down-ſitting, and mine up-riſing, thou underſtandeſt my thought afar off. Thou compaſſeſt my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted* with *all my ways. For* there is *not a word in my tongue, but, lo! O* LORD, *thou knoweſt it altogether. Thou haſt beſet me behind, and before, and laid thine hand upon me* *. This thought impreſſed upon his mind ſuch a *veneration* and *awe* of the great DEITY, the fountain and ſupport of univerſal life and being; and he found his faculties ſo ſwallowed up, and as it were loſt, in meditating on ſo *deep* and *immenſe* a ſubject; *man's reaſon*, in its utmoſt pride and glory, and with its moſt boaſted improvements and acquiſitions of knowledge, ſeemed now ſo *debaſed*, ſo *weak*, ſo narrow, and, in compariſon with infinity, ſo *deſpicable*; that the author of this *pſalm* could proceed no farther, without expreſſing his *admiration* at a boundleſs ſcope of intelligence, which he could neither explain,

* Pſ. cxxxix. 1——6.

nor

nor comprehend. And, therefore, he immediately adds, ſuch *knowledge* is *too wonderful for me: it is high, I cannot* attain *unto it* *.

BUT yet, though he acknowledged the *Divine omniſcience* to be full of wonders, and a heighth, to which no human, no finite, underſtanding could poſſibly aſcend; he ſaw, at the ſame time, that it might be capable of the plaineſt and moſt convincing *proofs*; and that there were, really, obvious and inconteſtable *proofs* of it in *nature*. And theſe, or, at leaſt, the two *general heads*, to which they are, in all their forms and variety of lights, reducible, he himſelf has, in the ſubſequent part of the *pſalm*, diſtinctly mentioned: *viz.* 'GOD's being the *contriver*, and *author*, of the whole frame 'of things; and his conſtant, eſſential, and intimate *preſence* with 'the ſyſtem of creation, and with every individual comprehended 'in it.'

THE *laſt* of theſe the *Pſalmiſt* introduces by way of inquiry—how it was *poſſible* for any (if they were unnaturally *inclined* to it, and from an utter darkneſs of their reaſon, and ignorance of the moſt important privileges and conſolations of derived and dependent natures, *deſirous* of it) to fly from that *vital* and *efficacious* ſpirit, that coexiſts with, animates, and diffuſes beauty, and order, and tendencies to happineſs, throughout the whole of created being. *Whither* (ſays he) *ſhall I go from thy ſpirit? Or whither ſhall I flee from thy preſence* †? *If I aſcend up into heaven* [beyond which, I cannot diſcern the moſt *diminutive* and *contracted* orbs of *light*] *thou* art *there* ‡. *If I make my bed in hell* [or could plunge myſelf into the moſt obſcure, and unknown, *manſions* of the *dead*, and the worlds *inviſible*, where even imagination loſes itſelf in darkneſs] *behold thou* art there ‖. If *I take the wings of the morning, and*

* Pſ. cxxxix. 6. † Ver. 7. ‡ Ver. 8. ‖ Ibid.

dwell

dwell in the uttermoſt parts of the ſea [*i. e.* if, with the *ſwiftneſs* of the *rays* of the *riſing ſun*, I could ſhoot myſelf, in an inſtant, to the uttermoſt parts of the *weſtern ocean*] *even there ſhall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand ſhall hold me* *; i. e. I ſhould ſtill *exiſt* in GOD, his preſence would be *diffuſed* all around me, his enlivening power would *ſupport* my frame. *If I ſay, ſurely the darkneſs ſhall cover me; even the night ſhall be light about me. Yea, the darkneſs hideth not from thee; but the night ſhineth as the day; the darkneſs, and the light*, are *both alike* to thee † [equally *conſpicuous* am *I*, and all my *circumſtances*, all my *actions*, under the thickeſt and moſt impenetrable *ſhades* of *night*, as in the *brighteſt ſplendors* of the *noon-day ſun*.] *For thou haſt poſſeſſed my reins; thou haſt covered me in my mother's womb* ‡.

FROM the *omnipreſence*, and *omniſcience*, of the DEITY, we learn,

FIRST, 'That there can be no *confuſion*, from the *beginning*, to 'the *end*, of things, to diſturb and perplex the *plan* of his govern-'ment, to fruſtrate, or impede, its *main deſign*;' becauſe, by his infinite underſtanding, he perfectly *knows*, and being every-where *preſent*, and the *firſt power* in the univerſe, is able to *regulate* all affairs, in *all places*, and at *all times*.

SECONDLY, We learn, that 'the *whole univerſe* may juſtly be 'conſidered as the *temple* of GOD, in every part of which he *for-'ever reſides*; and, conſequently, ſincere adorations, praiſes, and 'prayers, may be *rationally* offered every-where, and, we have the 'higheſt reaſon to believe, will be *graciouſly* accepted.

* Pſ. cxxxix. 9, 10. † Ver. 11, 12. ‡ Ver. 13.

IT

IT appears, from hence, FARTHER, that 'GOD is perfectly 'qualified for being the *judge* of the whole world—That no 'diſguiſes can *ſhelter* from his eye—that all artifices, and colour-'ings, of hypocriſy are *vain*—that circumſpection of ſpirit, and 'regularity of conduct, are *every-where* equally *neceſſary*—and that, 'as far as we are *conſcious* of our *integrity*, we may derive *inward* '*comfort*, from the contemplation of GOD's *omniſcience*, however 'we may be ſuſpected, ſlandered, vilified, and perſecuted by the 'world—and that no *good* diſpoſition, no *generous* purpoſe *formed*, 'though it was not in our power to *execute* it, none of our *con-'cealed* and moſt *ſecret* virtues, ſhall miſs of their due honour and 'reward.'

LASTLY, 'When *actions* and *characters* are of a *mixed* nature, 'the *omniſcient* GOD knows infallibly, how to *ſeparate* the one 'part from the other; and among *various* principles, that may '*jointly* influence, to fix on the *chief* over-ruling principle, which '*denominates* the character:' even when the mind of the agent may be too *diſtruſtful*, on the one hand, or too *preſumptuous* and *confi-dent*, on the other. Which, to *him*, is a leſſon—of *caution*, and ſtrict *ſelf-examination*; and to the *world* (where ſome circum-ſtances appear, that have an *unfavourable* aſpect only)—againſt for-ward and uncharitable *cenſures*. The cogniſance of the *heart* is ſubject to *omniſcience* only; the *heart* is the *true characteriſtic* of *virtue* and *vice*: while *outward* glaring, and ſeemingly unconteſt-able, *evidences* of *both* may be, in a great meaſure, *fallacious*.

CHAP. IV.

Of the Wiſdom *of* GOD.

THE perfections of GOD, which by their united influence, luſtre, and ſovereign energy, conſtitute his majeſtic greatneſs, his attractive lovelineſs, his infinite importance and uſe to the entire collective frame of nature, are commonly divided, and ranged under the two heads, of *communicable*, and *incommunicable*, attributes. The *firſt* are thoſe, which may be *derived*, and *deſcend* from him the fountain of life, and of every poſſible implanted power and faculty of being, to created natures: the *laſt* are, what even infinite wiſdom, and omnipotence itſelf, cannot cauſe any inferior and dependent effect to *partake* of, even in the leaſt degree of the *real property* itſelf, or the moſt remote *aſſimilation* to it. The abſolutely incommunicable perfections of the DEITY, in kind or reſemblance, are very *few*, and will be found, upon reflection, to be thoſe only, which relate either to his mere abſtract *eſſence*, or to the peculiar *mode* of his being; to which, in theſe reſpects, nothing elſe can bear a more ſtrict and adequate proportion, than as finite to infinite, or as direct contradictions can hold to each other. Such are—*eternity paſt*; *ſelf-exiſtence*, and *neceſſary being*; a *nature* for ever incapable of being completely *comprehended* by all, beſides his *own intelligence*; and *immenſity*.

THERE is ſcarce any thing, beſides theſe, which may not be imparted, and faintly delineated; in which GOD, the creator, may not appear, as it were by a *copy* of himſelf, *viſible* in the creatures.

Power, and *knowledge*, and *wiſdom*, and every diſtinct excellence of *moral character*, may ſtream, and iſſue forth as emanations, from the knowledge, wiſdom, and power *original*, and *ſupreme*. *Each* of theſe attributes are capable of innumerable *varieties*; and even *indefinite* degrees of *imperfection* ſuit, as well, with the general idea, as the conſummate heighth of *excellence*: they muſt, therefore, be allowed to be as poſſible in the *derivation*, as in the original *ſource*.

BUT notwithſtanding what has been conceded, concerning the juſtneſs of the diſtinction above-mentioned, conſidered in a general view, there is a ſenſe, in which the attributes of the DEITY, *partially* communicated, ſketched out in *out-lines*, and to the human race particularly, only ſo far in *example* and *viſible proof* exhibited, as to be a *firſt ſtep* in reaſoning, by which to *aſcend* to the ſingular character of immenſe excellence, there is, I ſay, a ſenſe, in which even theſe derived attributes are neceſſarily *underivable*; and that is, in the *degree* in which GOD himſelf poſſeſſes them; in their abſolute plenitude, in their conſummate heighth of excellence, in their neceſſary unalterable glory, incapable both of increaſe, and diminution. We ſhall therefore think, and ſpeak, moſt juſtly upon this great and venerable ſubject, if we admit, that ‘ *wiſdom* and *power* may be communicated, but not the *Divine* ‘ wiſdom and power; not *ſuch* a power as is uncontroulable, nor ‘ *ſuch* a wiſdom as is always infallible, and extends to all the poſ‘ ſibilities of things: For this would be to ſuppoſe the fountain to ‘ *empty* and *exhauſt* itſelf, and to make even *infinity* a derived and ‘ dependent attribute.’ The perfections of the DEITY as eſſentially *his*, his *ſublime* and *tranſcendent* character, muſt be conſidered ‘ in that very preciſe and determinate *manner* of exiſtence, ‘ in which they are inherent in *him*.’ In any *other* idea, they are

not *his* attributes; and in *this*, it is impoſſible, in nature, that they ſhould ever be *transferred*. They are as incommunicable as *ſelf-origination*, *eternity*, and abſolute *immenſity* itſelf.

AND hence we learn, why the firſt cauſe, and univerſal parent, of being is repreſented as *only wiſe*. For, in this deſcription of his matchleſs unparalleled excellence, it is evident to a demonſtration, that *revelation* does no more, than utter primitive and univerſal *reaſon*'s voice: becauſe, in the ſenſe of *underived*, *unmixed*, *independent*, *neceſſary*, and *immutable*, it is as certain and as plain a truth, that GOD *alone* is *wiſe*, as that he is the *ſole* being to whom ſelf-exiſtence can be aſcribed, and whoſe eſſence, and activity, are infinite and unlimitable.

THAT this moſt illuſtrious and excellent character of the DEITY, his unerring and boundleſs *wiſdom*, is a diſtinct ſubject from that of his infinite *intelligence*, I have already intimated in the preceding chapter: and it will be allowed, as a matter unconteſtable, by every one, that gives himſelf a little time to reflect. Knowledge, indeed, is the *foundation*, the *firſt principle*, and, as it were, the *parent* of wiſdom; but it is not wiſdom *itſelf*. Wiſdom *builds* upon knowledge a ſuperſtructure, by ſo much the more noble and excellent, as beneficial *practice* is preferable to mere viſionary and inactive *ſpeculation*. Wiſdom is knowledge *digeſted*, and *applied* to its right uſe, to the contriving and producing *order* and *good* upon the whole; and, conſequently, the two attributes are as really different, and as plainly diſtinct, from each other, as true and juſt *conduct* is, from the bare *intuition*, and exact *diſcernment*, of truth. And we have innumerable examples, and living proofs, that they do not always ſubſiſt and go together; and, by neceſſary conſequence, that they are, in their own natures, *various*

and *ſeparable* qualities. There may be *knowledge* without any *deſign*; but deſign is eſſentially included in the idea of *wiſdom*. An intelligent being may be capable of perceiving, and fixing certainly, what is the *beſt* and *fitteſt end*, and, at the ſame time, purſue the *worſt*. He may likewiſe have the moſt fitly *adapted*, and *ſubſervient*, *means* to ſecure this good end, within the ſcope and compaſs of his *knowledge*, and yet make uſe of *ſuch*, as are altogether *diſproportioned* to it; that can either only reach it in *part*, or tend, directly, to *fruſtrate* and *defeat* it. The whole of which is, in truth, ſaying nothing more, than that he may wilfully miſemploy his knowledge, ſtifle his inward convictions, and pervert both his *intellectual* and *moral* faculties: and this muſt be admitted, if the general ideas of *virtue*, and *vice*, be not abſolute contradictions. Men of a ſurpriſing capacity and ſtrength of genius, of the moſt enlarged and accurate comprehenſion, and the deepeſt penetration, have oftentimes, in practice, wilfully formed and proſecuted ſuch wild ſchemes, and run to ſuch an extravagance of moſt abſurd and deliberate *folly*, as mere *idiots*, or perſons otherwiſe diveſted of *reaſon* and *judgment*, have it not even in their power to *exceed*. And beings of a *ſuperior* order to mankind, in the way of ſelf-perverſion, and of wrong and irregular choice, diſgracing, and ſinking vaſtly beneath, their much clearer and more elevated apprehenſions of things, their knowledge, *likewiſe*, may never riſe above the dry amuſing ſpeculation, to the exalted heighth, of *true wiſdom*. This muſt, at leaſt, be allowed to paſs among the *poſſibilities* of things; which is all, that my preſent argument requires.

BUT, here, I deſire it may be remarked, that I do not intend to carry the argument at all *farther* than this, or to inſinuate, that *knowledge* and *wiſdom* are, in the great DEITY, ſo far *diſtinct* attributes, as that it will be ever poſſible, that they ſhould be, *actu-*

ally, diſunited and ſeparated; becauſe that may be *poſſible*, throughout the whole vaſt community of created and limited beings, which, with reſpect to his infinite and immutable eſſence, is a groſs and ſelf-evident *contradiction*. And, indeed, it ſeems to be capable of little leſs than full and certain demonſtration (as will, hereafter, be more particularly ſhewn) that from boundleſs *knowledge*, conſummate *wiſdom* muſt naturally, actually, and eternally flow; and that where there is no poſſibility of *ſpeculative*, there can be no *practical* error—no poſſibility of *deſigning* wrong, nor of *executing* with defect and confuſion. But, notwithſtanding this, it undeniably appears, that knowledge and wiſdom are, in the general *idea* of each, diſtinct and different *topics*, or *heads*, of reaſoning: and, therefore, if they are juſtly, they muſt alſo be diſtinctly, treated, when GOD is the *ſubject*, as well as when we are inquiring into the degree, and extent, of the ſame properties, as they are poſſeſſed by *ſubordinate ſpirits*. The *moral rectitude* of GOD may, perhaps, be clearly ſhewn to be as inſeparable from his *wiſdom*, as the latter is from his all-diſcerning and comprehenſive *knowledge*; and yet it is admitted to be both proper and neceſſary, that *each* be particularly illuſtrated. The propriety in point of order, and the neceſſity with reſpect to us, to aſſiſt our ideas, and enlarge and raiſe our ſentiments, is equally obvious, and muſt, therefore, be of equal weight in *both* caſes.

I SHALL only here add, to engage our attention more cloſely to this great and enlightening, but, in its utmoſt depth, immenſe and unfathomable ſubject, that the *wiſdom* of GOD is the *director* and *regulator* of all his *other* attributes, in their *outward* exertions and manifeſtations, for the ſupport, and beauty, and univerſal good of the creation. 'It contrives and orders for the whole:' and if this was wanting, neither power, nor juſtice, nor goodneſs itſelf, all benign,

benign, gracious, and liberal as it is, would be of any conſiderable ſervice to the univerſe of dependent beings. Nay, the effects of ſome of theſe principles might not only be limited, but they might, upon the whole, frequently interfere with and obſtruct each other.

For, without the government of impartial wiſdom, *power* might produce infinite miſchiefs, and ſpread the face of ruin and deſolation every-where; or, at beſt, it could open but a mixed, confuſed, and intricate ſcene of *partial* order, and *partial interrupted* good, for ever. And 'even *goodneſs*, the glory of God and man, and 'the chief moral felicity, if it be ſuppoſed to be a mere *impulſe* 'and *propenſion* in nature, that is not *adviſed* and *conducted* in every 'ſtep, and, in particulars, ſometimes *terminated* and *bounded* by 'wiſdom, even *goodneſs*, I ſay, left thus *alone*, and deprived of its 'ſureſt and ſafeſt guide, muſt often be *miſapplied*; and indirect, 'though involuntary, repugnance to itſelf, be the *ſpring* and *root* 'of *evil*.' So that it is a *goodneſs* ſupremely *wiſe* (or, in other words, *both* theſe perfections acting in harmony, and jointly diſpenſing their ſalutary influence) which is the rational object of our adoration; and in which *alone* we can confide for the defence of the *preſent*, the ſupply of the *future*, and the proviſion of *happineſs* upon the *whole*.

The ſame general kind of reflections, with theſe, I have thought it proper to introduce under *other* attributes, as, indeed, might in reaſon be expected; ſince they are *all* the attributes of the *one* moſt ſimple and uncompounded being, and, therefore, conſtitute an harmonious ſubject of inviolable *connection*. The *glory* of God, his ſurpaſſing ineffable glory (before which the brighteſt, moſt proud, and ornamental qualities, of every created exiſtence, fade and vaniſh) ariſes from the ſtrict *union* of all his *eſſential* powers. To

reſolve him therefore, wholly, into *wiſdom*, or *juſtice*, or *goodneſs*, and much more into ſovereign and abſolute *dominion*, unaccountable to a *ſuperior* power, and even uncontrouled by *moral* character, is to *debaſe* and *ſtain* his honour. Whether preſumptions of religious *enthuſiaſm*, or the affectation of *metaphyſical* ſkill and ſubtle philoſophiſing, be our *dark* and *mazy* guide, our judgment is in both caſes blinded, and preſcribes too narrow and contracted bounds to the divine excellence. Let us, therefore, learn from hence, to endeavour, at all times, to exhibit to our own minds, and to the underſtandings of others, the *whole* DEITY; GOD complete, and not a *part* of GOD; that his attributes may yield light and ſtrength to each other, and *none* of them be allowed ſuch an aſcendent influence, as to ſwallow up, and in effect annihilate the *reſt*: becauſe the conſequence of ſuch abſurd thinking muſt, in argument, be, deſtroying the very *being* of a GOD, and ſubverting all principles of religion.

BUT *how*, it may now be aſked, ſhall we form ſome diſtinct and intelligible idea of this *divine* attribute, *wiſdom*? *How* ſhall we raiſe, in our minds, a *general conception* of that, to the vaſt *dimenſions* of which, we ſhall never be capable of ſtretching and expanding our thoughts; and into the profound *receſſes* of which, nothing but *itſelf* can penetrate? To this I anſwer, that the *general conception* of wiſdom is eaſy, and the *character* invariable. As to the *definition* of the thing itſelf, without including its *ſcope* and *compaſs*, and *method* of operation, it is univerſally and unalterably the ſame, with reſpect to *all* intelligent minds, *create*, or *increate*, *human*, *angelical*, or *divine*. Wiſdom conſiſts eſſentially of theſe *two* parts, which compoſe the *whole* of its abſtracted and abſolute nature—FIRST, of the deliberate propoſing the *beſt*, and *fitteſt end*; and—SECONDLY, of the fixed choice, and ſteddy undeclining

ing purſuit, of the moſt *proper* and *effectual means*, in order to promote it.

THE propoſing the higheſt and nobleſt *end* (though wiſdom be generally centered not in the ſupreme governing *purpoſe*, but in the apt and dextrous execution) this, I ſay, is not an eſſential only, but the *prime* and moſt *ſolid*, branch of *wiſdom*; becauſe if a ſiniſter *end*, an end either abſolutely *wrong*, or but *low* and *imperfect* in point of excellence, be the determined ſcope of action, the more accurate the mind is in the diſquiſition of the beſt adapted *means*, and the more vigorous and ſucceſsful in the *proſecution* of them, there muſt be juſt ſo much the more of *deviation* from *rectitude* and *happineſs*, and, conſequently, of confuſion and miſery, in the general ſtate of the *moral* world. And if it ſhould be inquired, what is the moſt *worthy end*, for the DEITY himſelf, *i. e.* for the *greateſt* and *beſt* being in the univerſe, to purſue? I anſwer (far from the bold and inſolent thought of preſcribing to omniſcience) 'that nothing can appear, to us, to have ſuch intrinſic, engag-
'ing, elevated *worth*, and *merit*, to recommend it, as the produc-
'tion of *good*; the production of moſt *extenſive good*; the com-
'munication of *good* upon the *whole*; and, as far as *wiſe* and *juſt*
'government will admit, to the *univerſal collection* of beings, that
'are capable of happineſs or miſery.'

AND, from hence, it ſeems clear to me, that the queſtion—
'Whether *wiſdom*, or *benevolence*, be the *firſt ſpring* of *action* in
'the DEITY'—is in ſome meaſure unneceſſary. It needs, by no means, to be ſpun out into a long and laboured controverſy; but may I think, in very few words, be ſatisfactorily decided. For if by *goodneſs* be meant a gracious *ſource*, or *principle*, of action *guided* and *regulated* by *wiſdom*, the two things directly *coincide*, and

and form the ſame rational *plan:* becauſe, upon this ſuppoſition, their operation is *mutual*; and 'goodneſs never *diſplays* and *diffuſes* 'itſelf, but when wiſdom *conſents*, and preciſely in thoſe *inſtances*, 'and that *degree* and *no other*, than where wiſdom perfectly con-'curs.' But if *goodneſs* be conſidered as a kind of *inſtinctive* principle, a *conſtitutional*, or, if theſe may be deemed more worthy terms, an *eſſential* and *immutable*, propenſity of nature to communicate happineſs, it is then *inferior* to *wiſdom*; which is not a mere original inclination, or impulſe, exerting itſelf *neceſſarily*, but an *enlightened* and *deliberating* power. *Wiſdom* muſt *preſent* the *ſcene* to it, and *regulate* all its *actings*. *Wiſdom* muſt in all, and in each individual inſtance, frame the *model* and *proportion* of good, and contrive and deſign the *execution* of it. And it is, ſurely, moſt natural to admit 'the *directing principle* to be, in rank and order, '*ſuperior* to that, which is entirely *ruled* and *directed* by it.' So that ſhould we allow the *firſt ſuggeſtion*, the *firſt motive* to action, to be *gracious* and *benevolent diſpoſition*, yet as *that*, in all its particular *exertions*, is weighed and approved of by the ſupreme *wiſdom* of the DEITY, 'this laſt may juſtly be conſidered as the *di-*'*rect* and *chief ſpring* of *action*; with which, both *creation*, and '*providence*, are moſt cloſely and immutably connected.'

THE *proofs* of the infinite wiſdom of the DEITY may, I think, be properly reduced to two heads. The *firſt* may be, not unfitly, termed an argument *à priori:* by which I mean that particular kind of argument, 'in which, from *properties* and *characters* of 'GOD already demonſtrated, we deduce, in a way of ſtrict connec-'tion and neceſſary inference, *other properties*; and a proof is '*complete* in the *abſtract nature* of things, without any direct con-'ſideration, or mention, of *effects* produced.'—The *latter* comes, at length, to the *ſame* concluſion by a different method, demonſtrating

ſtrating the *wiſdom* of the firſt cauſe, from the *viſible* and *ſhining diſplays* of it in the works of nature. Let me briefly ſuggeſt a few of the moſt important hints, with reſpect to each of theſe.

And, first, As to what I have denominated the argument *à priori*. There is perhaps, in truth, no ſuch thing as a *ſtrict* and *abſolute* argument of this kind, poſſible to be conceived and traced, at leaſt, by *mankind:* for though the impoſſibility ſeems to take a much wider and more univerſal ſcope, yet I will not take, upon me, to preſcribe any determined, and unpaſſable, limits to the operations of *ſuperior* intelligences.—I therefore only ſay, that, with reſpect to *men*, a demonſtration even of the *being* of a God, from mere *abſtracted notions* and *principles* of truth, is ſcarce poſſible. For 'how could we entertain any idea of a *cauſe*, or, con-'ſequently, be led to the belief of an *original cauſe*, if we had 'no knowledge of *effects?*' Without doubt, therefore, the moſt judicious and learned writers on this ſubject never intended any thing more, when they profeſſed to aim at ſuch refined and demonſtrative proof as this, than that having aſcended, and riſen, from the knowledge of the *creature*, to the certain knowledge of an eternal and ſelf-exiſtent *creator*, they had *then* found out an *attribute*, that was *virtually* incluſive of *all others*; or that *unorigination*, and *neceſſary being*, comprehended in it every *poſſible* perfection, and the moſt exalted *heighth* of perfection. Whether this be a juſt and rational repreſentation of things, it is not my buſineſs, at preſent, to conſider. If it be true, it is, to the generality of mankind, dark and inefficacious reaſoning; and, through its obſcurity to common apprehenſions, eaſily liable to be evaded, or perplexed.

BUT though the world is juſtly to be cenſured, for being averſe to every thing that *ſtrains* and *exerciſes thought*, and, by that means, ſtrengthens the *intellectual powers*, at the ſame time that it ruffles the calm of *indolence*; though this, I ſay, is very far from being one of the honourable qualities of human nature, that it can ſcarce be brought to enter *deeply* into *reflection*, nor reliſh even the *attempts* of others to enlarge the underſtanding, and illuſtrate the evidences of what they, implicitly and from cuſtom, profeſs to believe; though they are apt to prefer florid deſcriptions, ſtrong paintings, and rhetorical flouriſhes, which ſtrike the *fancy*, with little aid and benefit to the *underſtanding*; yet this, however juſtly lamented, and proper to be occaſionally introduced, is a remark not neceſſarily connected with the purpoſe of the preſent diſcourſe. I therefore diſmiſs it for another, which is directly pertinent, and that is, that, in the *ſame* way, in which *all perfection* is ſuppoſed to be deduced from *ſelf-exiſtence*, the infinite *wiſdom* of the DEITY may be certainly concluded, from ſome of his *other* attributes already proved, or generally allowed.

AND the ſum of the argument is this—That as GOD is *omniſcient*, he muſt diſcern *infallibly* what is the *beſt end* to be propoſed, and what are the *fitteſt* and *apteſt means*, in order to the execution of it; to its moſt *ſure*, *eaſy*, and *perfect* accompliſhment—And that being poſſeſſed of *immutable rectitude* of nature, ſupreme in *power*, independent in *dominion* and *majeſty*, and having the whole reſource of his happineſs wholely within *himſelf*, he can have no *poſſible temptation* to *ſwerve*, in the minuteſt article, from the dictates of his *infinite underſtanding*, or, to be practically *abſurd*, while he is in ſpeculation *omniſcient*. His conſummate moral character precludes all *diſpoſition* to wrong, his ſelf-ſufficient and unchangeable

changeable felicity every ſuppoſeable *motive* to wrong. And where there is a clear unclouded *intellect*, always preſcribing, and approving, what is *right*, and no malignant *averſe* principle, which can poſſibly lead to the leaſt *deviation* from it, right action muſt in reaſon be admitted to *follow* as *concluſively* (though the powers, producing their ſeveral operations, are in *kind* different) *as* the moſt inevitable effects *flow* from their determined and neceſſary cauſes. In the firſt caſe, to ſuppoſe the contrary is a *moral*, as, in the other, it is a *natural* contradiction.

BUT the demonſtration here made uſe of may be confirmed by *examples*, and the rational greatly aſſiſted by the *external* proofs. And, ſo excellently has the great Creator adapted the ſyſtem of things for univerſal conviction, that all mankind may receive ſatisfaction, in a way ſuited to their own general *tardy* apprehenſions, and *unlaborious* methods of reaſoning.

WE know, by the very perception and intuition of our own being, that there is derived *intelligence*; we know, that there are different powers, or at leaſt vaſtly different cultures and improvements, of *reaſon*, even in the human ſpecies; and that, in a few ſelect examples, there are eminent inſtances of *wiſdom* diſplayed. In the fountain, therefore, of their moſt enlarged powers, there muſt be a ſpring of wiſdom, vaſtly *ſuperior* to the utmoſt they are capable of acquiring by a continual progreſs to eternity; and, in the fountain of univerſal being, a ſpring of wiſdom *equal* to creation, to innumerable diſtinct creations, to the producing an indefinite extent of creation, to the preſerving it in unvaried and uninterrupted order, to the eaſy becauſe inſtantaneous, every ſucceſſive moment inſtantaneous, regulation of all effects.

THE ſcene of the *viſible* world, therefore, exactly harmonizes with the demonſtration before produced. If we conſider the univerſe in general, ſo far as it is ſubject to the ſurveys of ſenſe, or included within the probable contemplations of human reaſon, wonders of wiſdom are comprehended in the *minuteſt*, as well as more groſsly expoſed, though even there but in faint and rude ſketches, in the *greater* and more *magnificent* objects. The deeper we ſearch, the more we diſcern of inimitable and incomprehenſible contrivance. Nature is compoſed of infinitely *various* parts, and yet a regular conſiſtent ſcheme, and, upon the whole, of inviolable connection. We ſee nothing *redundant*, nothing *ſhort* or *confuſed*, in reſpect of the general intent and ſcope of being, nothing *incongruous* to its own nature. Whatever is maintains its *diſtinct* rank, proſecutes its *appointed* courſe, contributes its *proportion* to the beauty and happineſs of the univerſe, interferes with *no other* part of the conſtitution, nor limits its *peculiar* operations. We find in every part of the GOD of nature's ſtupendous workmanſhip, two *different*, but ſtrictly *united* and *confederate*, views purſued; the preſervation of the *individual*, whether it be plant, or mere animal, or reaſonable man; and the making *all* to center in *one common point* of univerſal order, and uſe. We find *uniformity* conſtantly mixed with *variety*, and the *balance* of *both* ſo nicely, and with more than geometrical ſkill, adjuſted, as to produce no appearance of *diſorder*, as far as our obſervations are capable of reaching; and as we have good ground to believe, from what we ſee and know, to the utmoſt limits of the creation.

BUT it is not unlikely, that *particular examples* of the aſtoniſhing effects of infinite wiſdom, demanding reverence and praiſe, will raiſe ſtronger ſentiments, and fix a deeper impreſſion, than *general obſer-*

obſervations on the fabric and order of the world. I mention, therefore, as an inſtance of wiſdom for ever adorable by man, the *poſition* of the *ſun*, ſo as to diſpenſe its light and heat, regularly and in the moſt exact proportions, to its dependent planetary worlds; and the *ſituation* of the planets themſelves, as to the degree of their *proximity* to, or *diſtance* from, the ſun; without which, in all probability, according to the demonſtrable laws of *gravity*, the *leſſer* might not only have been diſturbed in their courſe, but have ſtarted from their orbits, and have reduced the ſolar ſyſtem to a wild and uninhabitable chaos. I inſtance, likewiſe, in the *diurnal motion* of the *earth*; without which, *one* part of this globe muſt have been involved in the ſhades of thick impenetrable darkneſs, and deſolated by froſts, and the *other* a land of drought and famine, a parched and barren wilderneſs, utterly incapable both of vegetable, and animal, life. I inſtance, further, in the *oceans*, and *ſeas*, thoſe vaſt caverns and receptacles of water, indented, as it were, by the arm of omnipotence at the ſuggeſtion of infinite *wiſdom*, to ſupply *vapours*, and *clouds*, *fountains*, and *rivers*; for verdure, beauty, and commerce, and the ſuſtentation and refreſhment of all earthly beings: In the implanted *inſtincts* of *brute* animals, excelling, in moſt inſtances, the moſt *elaborate* mechanical *ſkill* of man, and the moſt curious and ſtrong efforts of his *reaſon*; their divinely taught, and inſpired *ſagacity*, in diſtinguiſhing their proper food, and in the admirable ſtructure of their neſts; their *anxious care* of their young, no *longer*, than till they are capable of ſelf-preſervation and defence; and, finally, the *ſtrength* and *fury* even of the moſt timorous, and moſt innocent, in ſupport of *nature*, and the *ſucceſſive propagation* of its ſeveral *ſpecies*. To which I might have added innumerable other particulars, in the ſtructure of the external world, on which characters of a wiſdom, unfathomable and immenſe, are deeply ſtruck; and the glorious excellence of the Creator is moſt

ſkill-

ſkillfully diſplayed, as a ſubject demanding the loudeſt acclamations, and united ſolemn praiſes, of all mankind.

INDEED, the wiſdom of the DEITY is a theme *exhauſtleſs*, as large and voluminous as the book of nature, into which it is copied with ſuch admirable *exactneſs*, and an infinite *variety*. To paint it, according to its true dignity, 'every *part* of nature muſt be diſtinctly ſcanned; its hidden *compoſition*, its peculiar *uſes*, its general *ſubſerviencies*, expoſed to view; the *beginning*, the *middle*, the *conſummation* of things traced, brought to light, and exhibited as *one piece* of workmanſhip, in *one* accurate and fair *picture*, to the underſtanding.' And if even all this might be attained to, and were not a taſk vaſtly ſurpaſſing the moſt flighty, and adventurous, human capacity, our ideas muſt ſtill be far ſhort and inadequate; and there muſt be an *unmeaſurable ſum* behind, in the ſpring and ſource of wiſdom, 'capable of *diverſifying* the ſcenes 'of *creation* for ever, and of cauſing *freſh* beauties, *new* wonders, 'to ariſe.' Creatures not now exiſting may, perhaps, miriads of ages hence, be entertained and delighted and inſtructed by the contemplation of *theſe*, as we are by the numberleſs beauties and wonders of divine art, that are *now* diſplayed all around us.---Inſomuch, that the rugged inequalities, the craggy, to ſenſe horrid and noiſome, the abortive, and ſeemingly unfiniſhed and miſhapen, parts of nature are *rectitude* and *order* upon the whole, conſidered in the inſeparable *connection* with *other parts*, and with thoſe wholſome and beneficial *laws*, by which nature is, in general, ſuſtained.

MOUNTAINS are uſeful for *collecting* vapours to *ſupply* ſprings and rivers, for *generating* metals, for a *ſhelter* againſt piercing blaſting winds, and inclement ſeaſons, for the *production* of various

vegetables; and even to *relieve* and *ſolace* the ſight, which would be tired and ſatiated, and find no delight, in the dull uniformity of one ever-during, and ever-extended, *plain*. *Theſe* ought, therefore, never to be eſteemed as *defects*, but to be ranged among the eſſential *beauties*, of ſenſitive nature, if we confine our ideas to the beauty of *proſpect* only; without including, what is inexpreſſibly more engaging to the eye of reaſon, general *convenience*, and *uſe*.

WINDS, again, are neceſſary for *purging* the *air* of envenomed particles, deſtructive of vegetable, and all animal, being; and to prevent its being a *ſtagnated* and *putrid*, inſtead of a *light*, *pure*, *ſalutary* fluid.

NOXIOUS *plants*, and *beings* of the ſame *claſs* endowed with *ſenſe*, are, many of them, found to contain a treaſure of *medicinal* virtues, to repair the *waſte* of human nature; and to alleviate the *puniſhments*, which, in the original eſtabliſhed conſtitution of things, are wiſely *annexed* to its vicious exceſſes; but 'by ſuch a 'gradual and *ſlow* operation, that the puniſhment may be *felt* 'with a ſufficient ſeverity, as a paternal chaſtiſement and ſcourge 'of folly, a ſtrong ſpur to reformation, and an alarm, kindly 'given, to fly betimes from more dreadful vengeance to come; 'and yet the wound infixed not appear to be quite *deſperate* and 'incureable, ſo as to baniſh *hope*, the ſpring of activity and lively 'effort, and, conſequently, to leave no invitation, no effectual 'motive, to repent.' To this very *ſmall* part, therefore, of the ſcene of nature, ſurrounded, on all ſides, with *innumerable* objects of *apparent good*, the virtuous can make no reaſonable exception; nor can even the vicious exclaim againſt it, without implicitly taxing themſelves, both with ſtupidity and ingratitude.

ADD

ADD, to all theſe inſtances, that the moſt *rapacious animals* have generally their haunt, where men ſeldom reſort; *rank* and *poiſonous vegetables* rarely mix their growth, with the proper food and ſuſtenance of man; things *loathſome*, in original nature, are very unfrequently met with, to offend and ſhock his ſenſes; and *abortive births* are but *accidental* conſequences of thoſe wiſe and moſt excellent laws, by which human, and all animal, generation is maintained, and, without which, there would be a ſpeedy, and utter, extinction of all earthly life. Theſe things therefore, O GOD of nature, which the perverſe and ignorant urge as blemiſhes and errors in thy creation, even theſe, we acknowledge with humble praiſe, proclaim thy *wiſdom*, and *ſhew forth thy handy-work*.

AND of this, even the moſt ignorant and perverſe may, by a little reflection, be convinced. Could they but be prevailed upon calmly to *interrogate* themſelves, their underſtandings would be more opened and enlarged, by a clear diſplay of their own want of reaſon, and unſkilfulneſs in all true philoſophy. But if they are unperſuadable, aud have contracted a riveted averſion to ſelf-inquiry, let me, for once, be their monitor, and ſuggeſt to them a few eaſy and natural queſtions, which, in juſtice to their own minds, to their own honour, to their own implanted deſire of knowledge, they ought to aſk themſelves; and in juſtice to GOD too, before they inſolently preſume to arraign and cenſure his operations.

WOULD they then, becauſe *winds* are ſometimes wrought up into deſtructive and ravaging *ſtorms*, would they wiſh, that the *air* be never fanned and purified; and that *navigation*, and *commerce*,

and the *mutual correſpondence* of remote and diſtant nations, be for ever obſtructed? Would they, becauſe *mountains* appear to their ſight, or more delicate fancy, or affected taſte of infidelity, as overgrown *excreſcencies*, unpleaſing *protuberances* in nature, that there were no *ſprings* or *rivers*, no *verdant vallies*, and that *man* and *beaſt* ſhould be eternally pining, for want of the neceſſary accommodations of life? Would they, for fear of *abortion* in a world fruitful of being, and never likely to want a compleat ſtock of inhabitants, have the *laws*, by which every *diſtinct kind* is propagated, totally ſuſpended, and *life* utterly expunged from the creation? Would they, to avoid *imaginary* evil, introduce *univerſal* evil? Rather than there ſhould be a few inſignificant *ſtarts* from nature's uſual courſe, would they blot out all order? Rather than any thing ſhould fall ſhort of its perfect ſcope, would they have no *final cauſes*, no *end* at all purſued?

BUT they will perhaps ſtill retort upon us, and ſay, what need was there, that ſuch an imperfect conſtitution of things, in which diſagreeable are mixed with pleaſing ſcenes, hurtful with profitable, miſery with happineſs, and accidental irregularities reſult from general order; or, in other words, do not ſtart up from heterogeneous cauſes in direct oppoſition to nature, but ſpring ſometimes in an unavoidable channel from its original laws? Or how can ſuch a mingled, and ſuch an inconſiſtent, frame be juſtly eſteemed the plan and contrivance of infinite wiſdom?

To which I anſwer, that 'it is *perfect* in its *kind*.' This is, properly ſpeaking, the only ſubject of our preſent inquiry; becauſe if it be *thus only* perfect, it decides the queſtion concerning the unerring wiſdom of the DEITY ultimately, as to the *preſent* world, and leaves no room for a re-hearing, nor for any further appeal.

He appears, in *this fabric*, 'to have deſigned, and executed, up to 'the full ſkill of infinite wiſdom itſelf;' and, therefore, as the marks of it are here evident and undeniable, we can have no reaſon to doubt, but that infinite wiſdom was *actually* employed. Beſides, there is no other *poſſible* ſcheme of things, but what, for any thing we can know to the contrary, may *now* really exiſt, *entire* and *complete* within itſelf. If this therefore be *good* upon the *whole* (as mankind in general, notwithſtanding their perplexed ſpeculations, feel it to be, or they would *nauſeate*, inſtead of clinging ſo cloſe to it, as to be in agonies at the very thoughts of a ſeparation) if this frame, I ſay, be *good* upon the *whole*, it is only a *different* from all others, and conſequently a *new* diſplay, but, ſtill, a *ſuitable* and *worthy* effect of abſolute and unbounded wiſdom. 'The 'happineſs of the whole would have been imperfect without it.' And if the not deſigning a *leſſer* good, when all *higher* degrees may have been before communicated, would have argued a *defect* of wiſdom; the frame and order of this part of the creation, as deſtined for the habitation of man, muſt be an exactly proportionable *demonſtration* of wiſdom. We may therefore juſtly ſay (notwithſtanding all that has been already urged) with reſpect to *the whole* in its utmoſt variety and wideſt extent—*O* LORD, *how manifold are thy works, in wiſdom haſt thou made them all* *.

BUT I propoſe to extend my reflections further, than the magnificent ſtructure of inanimate things, and their various uſes; and beyond the ſurpriſing inſtincts and functions of ſenſitive life, regulated and bounded by ſtated laws—to nature's maſter-piece *man*; the *firſt*, in rank and dignity, of all the beings that inhabit this globe, and the *chief* of the viſible works of GOD. This muſt be a profitable, and one would think alſo, a moſt engaging and uſeful ſubject of in-

* Pſalm cxxxix. 14.

quiry

quiry—For what can be more worthy to be ſtudied, and diſtinctly known; 'what can be nearer, what more important to *man*, than *man?*' This is an inquiry, in which we are all intimately concerned, whatever our predominant paſſions are, becauſe the ſubject of it is our *own nature*, *ourſelves* in perſon. All other creatures, either by inſtinct, or by man's ſuperior power and capacities of nature over-ruled and controuled, are rendered ſubſervient to him. Beaſts of prey, even the moſt wild and furious, are captivated and tamed by his ſuperior faculties. Animals, of leſs violence and reſentment, afford him food and cloathing. For him, chiefly, plants vegetate, and the general face of nature is arrayed in verdant, and fragrant, beauties. It may, therefore, be juſtly expected, that the conſideration of his frame will open to us a peculiar, and ſurpriſing, ſcene of wiſdom. And our expectations are anſwered to their fulleſt heighth; for he is throughout *ſtupendous*; and, as far as the rank of his nature riſes, nothing can poſſibly be conceived more *artificial* and *elaborate*. The *outſide*, the *cabinet*, that includes the excellent and diſtinguiſhing powers of humanity, is moſt curiouſly wrought, and full of the livelieſt ſignatures of *Divine* contrivance.

THE *body* of man is a world in miniature: all its parts are moſt *accurate*, and many of the *minuteſt* and *fineſt* texture, and preſerved, as to their offices and operations, *diſtinct*; and, though crowded together in one ſmall ſyſtem, and variouſly diſpoſed and intermingled with each other, yet in nature ſeparate, and without the leaſt *confuſion*. Every *member*, every *organ*, every *ſenſe*, has its *peculiar* functions, which it diſcharges in *harmony* with all the reſt; and *conſpires* to one great end of general nutrition, health, vigour, the preſervation of life, and the due exerciſe of the ſublime mental powers. The *form* of his body is *erect*, moſt ſuitable to the preheminence of his nature, and his poſt of dignity and command;

pointed towards his native heaven, to which it is his intereſt and duty to aſpire; and admirably fitted for thoſe noble aſtronomical diſcoveries, which have enlarged his idea of the univerſe, and heightned his reverence of its Creator. For his *ſenſes*—one chief ſource of his *ideas*, inſtructive to his *mind*, and adminiſtring a profuſion of innocent delights, to refreſh and cheer the *animal* nature—*ſuitable objects* are provided, in the ſurrounding frame of things: 'He has, 'therefore, no need to have recourſe to *adulterate* gratifications, 'which *blaſt* the ſenſes, at the ſame time, that they *debaſe* and 'darken reaſon.' There is the ſtrongeſt viſible *guard* placed againſt *danger*, in the inſtance of *ſight*, which is the moſt tender, but important, of all our ſenſes. In the conſtruction of each, there is nothing but what is abſolutely neceſſary to its perfect exerciſe. Of the moſt uſeful, and moſt expoſed to outward accident, whether of ſenſe or outward bodily organ, there are *two* ordained by the wiſe proviſion of the GOD of nature; that by the *loſs* of a ſenſe, or an organ, man might not be reduced to a *deſtitute* and *defenceleſs* condition; not obſtructed in his improvements of *knowledge*, nor made incapable of the refined pleaſures of *ſociety*.

AND as to the preſent *penetration*, *quickneſs*, and *force* of the ſenſes, it ſeems to be adjuſted, by weight and meaſure, in the ſcale, and according to the rule, of abſolute omniſcience. Were our ſight more *dull*, or our hearing more *heavy* and *blunted*, there would be a veil drawn over the external face of nature, in a great meaſure defacing, and obliterating, its beauties; and mutual converſation would be rendered *diſagreeable*, and, by that means, gradually *declined*: mankind would be apt to affect *ſolitude*, and degenerate into *gloomy* tempers, and *recluſe* manners; which have a tendency to defeat the very deſign of their ſocial nature. On the contrary, a *microſcopic* eye would make ſome parts of nature appear *uncouth*, and others

frightful: a *teleſcopic* would ſwell gentle eminences into *mountains*, mountains into hideous *precipices*, and deform the moſt agreeable and pleaſant vallies, by ſinking them into deep *caverns*, horrible to ſight; nor could ſuch an alteration extend our *view*, becauſe all objects, together with the convexity of the earth's ſurface, would be magnified in proportion. Again, were the ſenſe of hearing, likewiſe, proportionably *raiſed* and *quickened*, the voice of thunder would terrify and diſtract, human ſpeech, unleſs uttered in whiſpers, would be offenſive, and a continual ſucceſſion of noiſe and tumult would break the repoſe of ſleep, and diſturb the quiet of human life. And as for the *touch*, were that rendered more *refined* and *exquiſite*, what now *pleaſes* would moſt grievouſly torment us, and our *pains* be quite unſupportable by humanity.

HOWEVER, if we ſtop even here, our inquiries will fall far ſhort, and our conceptions be, comparatively, low and groveling. We have, as yet, only ſurveyed the *tenement* of man, and have not, properly ſpeaking, converſed with 'man himſelf;' nor taken a view of the *eſſential*, and more *noble*, principles in his conſtitution. Let us go on, therefore, to ſearch a little into 'the make of 'his mind, his powers of *reaſon*, his *moral* faculties, his implanted '*ſocial* inſtincts and *benevolent* propenſions; which are the things 'that moſt honourably diſtinguiſh, and mark out *humanity*, and 'render it capable of an *aſſociation* with angels, and of the *life* of 'GOD.' In the ſupreme *directing*, and *executive*, powers of human nature, powers, by which alone man juſtly ſuſtains his *rank*, proſecutes his *end*, and can arrive at his due *perfection*; in theſe, I ſay, we may reaſonably expect to find the plaineſt delineations, and ſtrongeſt characters, of his *former*, his *father*, after whoſe *image* his mind was originally made. For, ſurely, it can never be imagined, that the parent of being 'has laviſhly expended his

'greateſt

'greateſt care, and art, upon *inferior* deſigns, and *meaner* compo-
'ſitions; and is leaſt viſible, and has left the fainteſt traces of his
'divine ſkill, in his moſt *excellent* workmanſhip.'

SUFFER me, before I begin the diſtinct conſideration of this uſeful ſubject (with which it becomes us to be moſt intimately acquainted) to premiſe one remark, and that is, that *every part* of the firſt eſtabliſhment and order of *creation* has been maintained, in the ſame ſtated and regular courſe, throughout all ages, and is, thence, become a fixed law of *providence*; ſince the ſame *place* and *connection*, which it held in the original *ſtructure*, it conſtantly preſerves in the general *regulation* and *government* of things. The proofs, therefore, of the unbounded wiſdom of the DEITY in creation, and providential rule, are not to be regarded, or treated, as *diſtinct* evidences; but the *ſame inſtances*, which commenced with nature itſelf, and are now the ſtanding laws by which the univerſe is governed, muſt be equally *inſtances*, and *demonſtrations*, of *both*. How far the univerſal architect, and, for ever, the ſupreme director, of all the motions of this vaſt and wonderful machine, may, upon *fit* occaſions, ſuſpend, check, or divert the influences of natural cauſes, we cannot exactly determine. That there *may be* ſuch interpoſitions as theſe, *ſometimes*, is highly reaſonable to be ſuppoſed; but the ſecret ſpecial operation is imperceptible by man, and cannot be certainly diſtinguiſhed. Our *proofs*, therefore, of *wiſdom* muſt be always drawn from what plainly *appears* to us, which is nothing more, than the general eſtabliſhed *laws* of *providence*: and all of theſe are equally laws and orders of *creation*.

I NOW proceed to examine ſome of the plain diſcoveries, of moſt amazing and gracious wiſdom, in the reaſonable, moral, and ſocial frame of man; which conſtitutes the *man*, and is the high-placed boundary,

boundary, that mere *animal* nature cannot paſs; which *links* with angels, and is the firſt *ſketch* and *copy* of divinity. Let us begin, then, with endeavouring to trace the footſteps of ſupreme wiſdom —'in the *intellectual* faculties of human nature, and the appointed '*method* of their *cultivation*.' Whether the *original* faculties of the mind of man are of *equal* ſtrength, *equal* ſagacity, and capable, in *all*, of the *ſame* ſublime and extenſive operation, is an uſeleſs, as well as a perplexed and blind, diſpute. The apparent deſcending *ſcale* of being, and the univerſal *ſtate* of human nature in every age, exhibit, to our view, a ſeeming *difference* of the firſt implanted powers. We find in *animals*, *ſome* endued with lively inſtincts, which bear a near reſemblance of *reaſon*; while *others* are juſt raiſed above mere *vegetative* life. It muſt therefore be the more probable ſuppoſition, if we argue upon analogy, that, among *men* likewiſe, there may be ſome not exalted to a great *heighth*, above the head and prime order of the brute creation; while others are as *nearly allied* to the loweſt rank of ſuperior intelligences: and in this deſcent, perhaps from *infinity* itſelf, the Divine *wiſdom* is more illuſtriouſly repreſented, more ſtupendouſly diverſified—There is not the leaſt *blank* or *chaſm* in the creation—All poſſible *ſpaces* are filled up; all *exiſtence*, all *good*, are communicated—There is nothing left for the moſt abſolute or conſummate *wiſdom* to *deſign*, or *execute*.

BUT this, though a diſplay of wiſdom demanding our humble veneration, is not the immediate ſubject of our propoſed inquiry, nor ſtrictly eſſential to the full and ſatisfactory determination of it. For ſhould it be admitted, that the *faculties* of *all* human ſouls are, in their abſtract and unembodied ſtate, reducible to one *level*, one preciſe and definitive *compoſition*; yet it is undeniable, that, in their preſent ſtate of confinement, they exert themſelves with different

energy, and with a remarkably different *compaſs* of penetration; and, that this is not wholly owing to the various degrees of *intelligence*, and *application*, in particular ſubjects, but to inviolable *laws*, and unſurpaſſable *limits*, ordained and fixed in nature. *Some underſtandings* are not capable of aſcending, and riſing, to the exalted heighth of *others*. Be it a *flaw* and *blemiſh* in its *original*, leſs perfect, conſtitution; be it an *hereditary* or *accidental diſorder* in the animal œconomy; it proves, however, to be ſuch an effectual *bar*, as all the *native ſtrength* of the mind collected together, and making its moſt generous efforts, cannot *paſs*. The ſubject, therefore, muſt be handled in exactly the ſame manner, while we confine the ſcope of our reaſonings to the preſent life, as if 'the human *mind* 'was, at firſt, differently *formed*, and its inherent *powers* were, at 'their creation, greatly *diverſified*.'

THE only inquiry, therefore, is, what marks of *wiſdom* are diſcovered, in this *actual* ſcene and courſe of things? To which I anſwer, that the communication of *intelligence* is a demonſtration of *wiſdom*; the communication of the *higheſt* human intelligence, of *admirable* wiſdom; the communication of different *degrees*, of human intelligence, of admirable *various* wiſdom. And, beſides, theſe *different* capacities are the beſt adapted means to the univerſal *improvement* of the mind of man, and to the excellent purpoſes of *ſociety*. If *all* were capable of making, exactly, the ſame *progreſs*, of conceiving, and conſequently of expreſſing, their ſentiments upon every ſubject in the ſame *light*, every one would have the *whole reſource* of knowledge, and of intellectual delight, within *himſelf*; and there could be no poſſible ſpur to the offices of *mutual converſe*, from which, we know by experience, our chief *proficiency* in knowledge ſprings; and the interchangeable, neceſſary, offices of *humanity*, and *friendſhip*, are principally ſupported, and enforced.

enforced.—There could be no ground of *emulation*, no motive to *excel*: for all excellence muſt argue more, or leſs, *variety*; every ground of emulation neceſſarily ſuppoſes *it*. The mind of man is, therefore, encouraged, and prompted, to *exert* itſelf to the utmoſt, by the *preſent* conſtitution; but, by a *contrary* frame, its intellectual faculties would be rendered *ſluggiſh* and *inactive*, and its ſocial diſpoſitions *contracted*.

AND as for the *ſlow* operation of the human faculties, and the neceſſity they are under of ſubmitting to a *long*, and, for the moſt part, *paſſive* inſtruction, this muſt be allowed to be of eminent ſervice; as it inſpires, in the very initiation into intelligent and moral life, when habits are moſt deeply fixed, that modeſt *diffidence* of our own judgment, that *open*, *attentive*, and teachable temper, which are the principal ſources of *extenſive knowledge*, even where there is the moſt *lively* and *ſhining* genius; and the ſureſt preſervative from the errors of *fancy*, and *ſuperficial examination*, and the more incurable miſtakes of *ſelf-conceit*. Beſides the preſent *ſlow*, and *laborious*, operations of reaſon do, by conſtant exerciſe, ſtrengthen the *faculty* itſelf. In every ſtep, it acquires new *vigour*, and freſh *patience* of labour; the *difficulty* of cloſe thinking by degrees vaniſhes; and both the *pleaſures*, and *advantages*, of it are ſenſibly increaſed: which is the *wiſeſt* conſtitution, that could poſſibly be contrived, for the dull and reluctant faculties of human nature, *enticing* them on, and *diſpoſing* them, by degrees, for their utmoſt improvement.

LET us now turn to another topic, and that is, the *wiſdom* of the ſovereign author and diſpoſer of univerſal nature, in 'the *eſta-* 'bliſhment, *growth*, and *conſequences*, of the *habits* of the human 'mind.' By this, all the accidental *diſorders* of degenerate na-

ture, and the peculiar *temptations* to particular vices intermingled with the preſent frame, may be, at leaſt, *counterbalanced*, if not entirely *cured* and *ſubdued*. *Habit* introduces a ſuperior force to mere *natural* propenſions, which, when they are irregular and hurtful, it *controuls* in every motion, and conſequently *weakens*; acquiring daily, a new ſtock of *authority* and ſovereign *command*, to itſelf, by diminiſhing the *power*, and conſequently the *reſiſtance*, of the oppoſite paſſions. Beſides, if *ſucceſſive* acts of goodneſs were not thus, as it were, *collected* together, to form a predominant and over-ruling *power*, mankind could not have ſuch a firm confidence in *each other*, even for the offices of mutual *juſtice*, as is neceſſary to hold ſocieties together; nor could any one man enjoy the *comfort* and proper *ſatisfaction* of his integrity, for fear of declining in the very *firſt ſtep* (which, in the caſe of a virtuous habit, is next to impoſſible) from the path of virtue and happineſs for ever. Add to this, that the firſt *commencement* of habits is a friendly warning, to fly from every inſtance of vice, as the extremeſt corruption and infamy of human nature. For when, upon the *firſt* immoral action, a man finds his principles of religion, and powers of reaſon, *debilitated*; and upon the *ſecond*, *third*, or *fourth*, a *lethargy* of mind beginning; the voice of *reaſon* moſt certainly is—Fly from future contagion, fly, betimes, from ſhame and miſery: if he has no regard to theſe kind admonitions, that muſt be wholly laid to the charge of ungoverned and impetuous paſſions, and the voice of *nature* is ſtill wiſe, and benevolent. To conclude this head, in the *conſequences* of habits, there is provided a dreadful *puniſhment* of licentiouſneſs, and a ſignal *reward* of virtue, from the unalterable tendency of things, as the *laſt* criminal gratification introduces, ſtronger *incapacities* for purer and more ſublime enjoyments, and an acceſſion of miſery; and the *laſt* act of virtue, a greater facility and delight in doing good.

THE

THE conſummate *wiſdom* of the DEITY is further conſpicuous, in 'the univerſal moral *ſenſe*, or natural *conſcience*, of good and 'evil.'—For though all morality be, in my opinion, capable of the ſtricteſt demonſtrations of reaſon, yet this is not the general talent of mankind. They are *unuſed* to argue, they are *averſe* to it, they ſeem through exceſſes of indolence, and by being immerſed deeply in the gratifications of animal life, to *loath* it. This the creator probably *foreſaw*, and, therefore, that there would be but few *moral* ſentiments preſerved amongſt mankind, if a kind of *inſtinct* did not urge, to what *reaſon* was not likely to ſupport. He therefore, with moſt illuſtrious and admirable wiſdom, implanted a *principle*, and interwove it with the eſſential frame of human nature, that would immediately *dictate* right and wrong in all capital inſtances, without an intervening progreſſive train of reaſoning; by which, mens temptations to vice are immediately *repelled*, or their extravagancies, at leaſt, *reſtrained* and *limited*, and a *ſeed* of reformation, and future virtue, is lodged in the mind, ſcarce poſſible to be extirpated. Were mankind left to deduce their duty in an exact courſe of *argumentation*, the conſequence would be, from the preſent inexertion of reaſon, and aſcendency of paſſion, a general *confuſion* of right and wrong. But the univerſal principle of *moral ſenſe*, and *conſcience*, is both an *expeditious*, and a *vigorous* principle.

No leſs remarkable evidences of the adorable *wiſdom* of the creator are, the 'affections and inclinations to ſociety, and to a 'common participation of happineſs, *congenial* with, and *inſepa-* 'rable from, human nature.' Mankind are not a *confuſed collection* of individuals, but a *natural ſociety* of univerſal and indiſſoluble intereſts; they are therefore endued with the *ſpirit*, the

innate *principles* and *tendencies* to ſociety—Their *frame* would otherwiſe be diſproportioned and defective; but it is, now, completely adapted to the ultimate end of their being. Their various degrees of intelligence and natural power point out the ſeveral *ſubordinations* and *offices* of life, without which human ſocieties could not regularly, or conveniently, ſubſiſt; and their indigent, and mutually dependent, nature moſt powerfully enforces its *reciprocal* and *unalterable* duties.

To mention, briefly, a few other particulars.—'The uncertainty 'of *future* events, and of the *final* reſult of things,' has a natural tendency to prevent a too extravagant exultation, and fatal remiſſneſs and ſecurity, in *proſperity*; and deſpondence, and inactivity, in *adverſe* circumſtances—The nearly adjuſted '*equality* at firſt ap-'pointed, and ſtill upon the whole maintained invariable,' was the only *proper* means of preſerving the moſt delightful affinity, the moſt refined ſentiments of friendſhip, between the two ſexes of mankind: from whence the moſt exquiſite pleaſures of *reaſon*, that are intermingled with *any degree* of *paſſion*, can poſſibly ariſe.—And, finally, 'the virtues of ſuch a *low* claſs of beings, 'as mankind are, could in no way ſo perfectly be *matured*, and 'raiſed to their full *growth*, as in a ſtate of *probation* and *diſci-'pline*;' which, by frequently *trying*, *hardens* the virtuous temper, and may render it almoſt equally *invincible*, with that of ſuperior natures. It acquires, by this means, a prodigious ſtrength of *reſolution*, and a habit of *ſelf-denial*. Beings void of paſſion, and poſſeſſed of a conſtant ſerenity and clearneſs of reaſon, may be always *prepared*, if they will recollect and uſe their inward ſtrength, to ward off every eminent and threatning danger. But thoſe in whom paſſion has the prevalent ſway, and reaſon is in a great meaſure uncultivated, muſt not only derive the chief part of their

their *intrepidity*, from facing danger, but of their *power*, from encountering and ſubduing it.—The *wiſdom* of GOD, therefore, is moſt eminently diſplayed in the *make* of man, and eſpecially in his *internal frame*, though it ſhines in infinite other forms (more conſpicuous to ſenſe, and perhaps more ſubject to univerſal obſervation) in all his glorious works.

THUS have I ſuggeſted ſeveral inſtances, of moſt adorable and ſtupendous wiſdom, that are apparent in the works of nature; and have endeavoured to fix on ſuch, chiefly, as for the facts themſelves are unexceptionable, and where the evidence lies moſt obvious to the common apprehenſion of mankind, unimproved by deep *ſcience*, and ſkill in *philoſophy*. And as many of theſe are proofs that ſtrike our very *ſenſes*, which, by the wiſe appointment of the GOD of nature, are always *open* to let in ſome light upon paſſive minds, and prevent, by this means, the whole human race, a very few excepted, from ſinking into rude and ſavage ignorance; theſe, I ſay, being *ſenſible* proofs, muſt be much better adapted for yielding univerſal conviction, than more abſtruſe deductions of reaſon. It is natural for me to obſerve (and agreeable to the order of diſcourſe, which I at firſt propoſed) that the ſame method is taken in the holy *ſcriptures*, to impreſs the minds of men with a ſtronger idea of the ſupreme *wiſdom* of the DEITY; and that many of the moſt remarkable diſplays of wiſdom, in the fabrick of the world, which I have particularly mentioned, are *therein* alſo *diſtinctly* taken notice of, and eſpecially by *David*, in the 104th *Pſalm*; which ſhews the pious adoration, therein expreſſed, to be not the enthuſiaſtic flight and tranſport of a *poetical* genius, but the reſult of *deliberate* reflection; and we may likewiſe collect from hence, in ſome meaſure, the general *correſponding* ſenſe of human nature.

THIS

THIS *Pſalm* begins with remarking the amazing ſkill of the DEITY—in fixing the *ſituation* of the *earth*, and its *regular unvaried* orbit—who, in the figurative ſtile of the writer, *laid the foundation of* it, that *it ſhou'd not be removed for ever* *. It was at firſt, according to the *Moſaic* account of the creation, a chaos, a wild and dark abyſs, *covered with the deep as* with *a garment*—But *at thy rebuke, O* LORD, *they fled, at the voice of thy thunder they haſted away*; but not ſo as to be annihilated, not ſo as to be quite abſorbed—For they ſtill continue to *go up by the mountains* in vapours, from thence deſcend in ſprings, and *go down, by the vallies, into the place which thou haſt founded for them: Thou haſt ſet a bound which they may not paſs over, that they turn not again to cover the earth* †. *He watereth the hills from his chambers, the earth is ſatisfied with the fruit of thy works. He cauſeth the graſs to grow for the cattle, and herb for the ſervice of man: and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to ſhine, and bread* which *ſtrengtheneth* his *heart. The trees of the* LORD *are full* of ſap; *the cedars of* Lebanon, *which he hath planted*; *where the birds make their neſts*; as for *the ſtork, the fir-trees* are *her houſe:* ſo that the wild uncultivated parts of nature bear, upon them, plain ſignatures of *wiſdom*, and are not deſtitute of their uſes; *the high hills* are *a refuge for the wild goats, and the rocks for the conies* ‡.

WITH reſpect to the heavenly bodies—*He appointeth the moon for ſeaſons, and the ſun knoweth his going down: Thou makeſt darkneſs, when all the beaſts of the foreſt do creep* forth: *The young lions roar after their prey, and ſeek their meat from* GOD. Theſe, as included within the ſyſtem of nature, muſt be allowed their

* Ver. 5. † Ver. 6, 7, 8, 9. ‡ Ver. 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

proper

proper ſeaſons for acquiring food, but not ſo, as to interfere with the neceſſary ſuſtenance of other *weaker* animals, or with the operations and employments of *rational* man: When *the ſun*, therefore, *ariſeth, they gather themſelves together, and lay them down in their dens*; and then *man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour until the evening.—The earth, O* LORD, *is full of thy riches.*

So, the *Pſalmiſt* adds, is the *great and wide ſea*, in which there are *things creeping innumerable, both ſmall and great beaſts* *. This vaſt ocean is a kind of cement, and bond of amity, between the moſt diſtant nations; a medium of commerce, ſociety, and reciprocal friendſhip, to all mankind—For *there go the ſhips*: there is *that Leviathan*, moſt probably the whale, the greateſt wonder in all the watery regions, whom *thou haſt made to play therein*; and to adminiſter, in various reſpects, to the convenience and ſervice of man. The inhabitants of the deep *wait all upon thee, that thou mayeſt give* them *their meat in due ſeaſon: Thou hideſt thy face*, and *they are troubled*; *thou takeſt away their breath, they die, and return to their duſt* †. But the diſtinct ſpecies are ſtill preſerved in an orderly and uninterrupted ſucceſſion: *Thou ſendeſt forth thy ſpirit*, and *they are created*; and, after the deſolation of blaſting winds, and winter-froſts, the life, and verdure, and fragrancy of nature is reſtored; *and thou reneweſt the face of the earth* ‡. Upon ſurveying all which, and ſuppoſing him not to have been *enlarged* beyond the wiſeſt ſentiments of his own times, the author of this *Pſalm* might very naturally break out into the following pious exclamation—*O* LORD, *how manifold are thy works! In wiſdom haſt thou made them all.*

* Ver. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25. † Ver. 26, 27, 29. ‡ Ver. 30.

WE find, likewiſe, a moſt beautiful and elegant paſſage to the ſame purpoſe, where *wiſdom* is introduced as ſpeaking of *herſelf*, in the following manner. *The* LORD *poſſeſſed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was ſet up from everlaſting. When he prepared the heavens, I* was *there when he ſet* a compaſs *upon the face of the deep* *. When *he garniſhed the heavens, ſtretched out the North over the empty place, and* hung the earth upon nothing †: When he *meaſured the waters in the hollow of his* hand, and *meted out heaven with a ſpan, and weighed the mountains in* ſcales, *and the hills in a* balance ‡. Theſe are the grandeſt and nobleſt deſcriptions of the creation of the world, in weight and exact proportion, by GOD the great geometrician (as *Plato* ſtiles him) that were ever made; and from whence our ſublime *Engliſh Poet* took the firſt hints of ſome of the moſt ſhining beauties in a work, that does honour to our language, and to our country ‖.

* Prov. viii. 22, 23, 27. † Job xxvi. 7, 13. ‡ Iſ. xl. 12.

‖ The paſſages, here referred to, are the following in MILTON's *Paradiſe Loſt*.

Nor ſtaid; but on wings of Cherubim
Uplifted, in paternal glory rode
Far into chaos, and the world unknown,
For chaos heard his voice. Him all his train
Followed in bright proceſſion, to behold
Creation, and the wonders of his might.
Then ſtaid the fervid wheels, and in his hand
He took the golden *compaſſes*, prepar'd
In GOD's eternal ſtore, to circumſcribe
This univerſe, and all created things.
One foot he *center'd*, and the other turn'd
Round, through the vaſt *profundity* obſcure;
And ſaid, Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds;
This be thy juſt circumference, O world! Book Seventh.

And earth *ſelf-balanc'd* on her *center hung*. Ibid.

IT has been an obſervation made of old, and allowed in all ages, that 'the univerſe is full of GOD.' By which was not directly meant, that the creative power, inherent in him, is eſſentially preſent with, pervades, and, every inſtant, animates the whole frame; but that viſible *ſignatures*, and glorious *exhibitions*, of DEITY are ſtrongly impreſſed on all parts of nature. If it be aſked, how it is that GOD, who with reſpect to his infinite eſſence is inviſible, is thus clearly diſplayed to the notice and obſervation of mankind, and may be as certainly and univerſally *perceived*—as if he was an object obvious to *ſenſe*?—The true anſwer is, that it can only be by a demonſtration of his *attributes*. And ſhould it be further inquired, by what *attributes*, chiefly, he thus *appears* every-where, and is ſeen, and acknowledged, to be the ſupreme vital and governing ſpirit—The anſwer again muſt be, that finite natures can contain no direct copy of *eternity*, *ſelf-exiſtence*, and *immenſe* being: That the *ſpirituality* of GOD likewiſe, as to its preciſe nature, cannot be immediately collected from notices of ſenſe, *contrary*, in all their poſſible forms and varieties, and even in the moſt ſubtle and refined, to the *idea* of *ſublime* and *pure* ſpirit. And *juſtice* itſelf muſt, of neceſſity, appear to be frequently obſtructed, and partially executed (and as a fair and credible preſumption, only, of complete and univerſal *right* hereafter) in a ſtate not intended for *retribution*, but for diſcipline and moral improvement.

POWER therefore, and *wiſdom* are the characters, by which (at leaſt moſt conſiſtently and unconteſtably) GOD *appears* and is *viſible* in his works: and, conſequently, his *wiſdom*, as to the evidences and uſes of it, muſt be ranked among his higheſt attributes, in the belief of which we ſhould endeavour firmly to fix and eſtabliſh our minds, as a neceſſary principle of religion. Perſons of

the moſt exalted genius, and the brighteſt acquiſitions of knowledge, in every age of the world, have thought of it with profound and humble veneration, and made it a ſubject of their devouteſt praiſes: and none, beſides a very few, who have by general conſent, been branded with infamy, as ſhallow and ſuperficial thinkers, ſtrangers to the conſtitution and true philoſophy of nature, of wild conceit and unbounded arrogance, have preſumed, ſeriouſly, to tax the great author of the univerſe with *abſurd* and *lame* contrivance, or *bungling* operation. Even the *atheiſt* himſelf has frequently admitted the ſtructure of the world to be of exquiſite beauty and harmony, though *without deſign*, and of inimitable art, *without art*. And it is no wonder at all, that this ſenſe, of contrivance and order, has been generally improved from the firſt ages of the world, becauſe *here* the evidences preſent themſelves to the *firſt* openings of reaſon; and the ſtupendous wiſdom of the DEITY does not lie hidden in the dark and impenetrable *receſſes* of nature, but are ſcattered, as it were, all over the external *ſurfaces* of things: whoſe admirable compoſition, various, elegant, and exhilerating beauties, and general conſpiring uſes, in a manner force their way to the underſtanding.

LET me add, that there are no diſquiſitions, which the mind of man is capable of making, more *noble* than theſe, as well as none more *uſeful*. They raiſe and enlarge the underſtanding, and ſtock it with refined and great ideas; the ſeed of piety, and of the moſt important moral reflections. And, beſides, the works of GOD, which are *great* and *honourable*, every-where replete with *wonders*, and adorned with inexpreſſible *beauties*, muſt, in the progreſſive contemplation of them, continually afford new ſcenes of *delight*, when they are *ſought out* by thoſe, *who have pleaſure therein*. If indeed they are regarded as matters of mere curioſity, they can riſe

no

no higher than the inſignificant amuſement of a little *virtuoſo* mind, which is not inquiſitive about the more *inſtructive* and *edifying* parts of nature; and hunts after *ſhells* and *inſects* from no other principle, than the love of *novelty*, or to feed *oſtentation*. But if they inſpire ſtrong religious ſentiments, ſtrike a reverent and deep impreſſion of the infinite wiſdom of the creator, and engage us to conſecrate our affections, our inward powers, and all our ſtudies, to his honour, they are then the worthy employment of the true *philoſopher*, and the *chriſtian*; ſubſervient to the beſt uſes of human life *here*, and to the great purpoſe of *immortal* being.

It deſerves alſo to be conſidered, that there is ſcarce any character of the Supreme Being, that has a more direct tendency to huſh the diſturbed and anxious world to *peace*, and ſpread an univerſal *calm* over intelligent nature, than that of his indefectible and boundleſs *wiſdom*. It brightens up the whole ſcene of creation, inſpires confidence, and hope, a humble acquieſcing temper, contentment and eaſe, under the *preſent*, and a compoſed ſerenity in expectation of the *future*. It ſtops the mouth of peeviſh complaint, ſtills mutinous paſſion, aſſuages every inward grief, by ſuggeſting mollifying and healing ſentiments, and reconciles the mind to all events. For how can we allow ourſelves to deſpond, through exceſſes of weak and puſillanimous paſſion, to be of an agitated impatient ſpirit, or indeed to repine, under what is, and will be, and muſt be, in the ultimate completion of the ſcheme of nature and providence, the *wiſeſt* and *fitteſt* and *beſt*? Such a conduct is ſcarce more irreverent to God, than it is a ſtain and diſgrace to our own reaſon: it is an offence both againſt *nature*, and *religion*.

Finally, The conſideration of God's infinite *wiſdom* is particularly neceſſary to teach us humility, when appearances are dark

and intricate, ſince there muſt of neceſſity, in the vaſt and complicated deſigns of an *infinite* mind, be innumerable things *impenetrable* by our finite reaſon. We cannot admit any thing as *right* and *fit*, even in the Divine government, which *contradicts* the general principles of equity and goodneſs: But when *that* does not directly appear, and our not ſeeing it to be for the general good, may ſpring, entirely, from the ſhallowneſs and confuſion of our underſtandings; it muſt be an unaccountable ſtrain of *pride*, for ſuch as we, who are poſſeſſed, as it were, but of the dawnings and faint glimmerings of reaſon, to arraign the proceedings of that Supreme Intelligence, which has manifeſted ſuch exquiſite art and contrivance, and diſcovered ſuch ſkill, in the minuteſt productions, as the *united* wiſdom, of the whole human ſpecies, could never equal. What the wiſe ſon of *Syrac* ſays of *pride* in general, may be affirmed of *ſcepticiſm* and *cavilling* in ſuch caſes as *theſe*—It was *not made for man.* It is unſuitable to his rank and character, to the meanneſs of his reaſon, and the multiplicity and ſtrength of his paſſions and prejudices: ſo that it always argues, beſides groſs *impiety*, ſtupid *ignorance* of *human nature.*

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

Of the Holineſs, *or* Moral Perfection; *and of the* Juſtice, *of* GOD.

I NOW proceed, according to the order which I firſt propoſed, to diſcourſe on what are ſtiled, in a ſingular and appropriate ſenſe, the *moral attributes* of GOD. Theſe are reckoned *diſtinct* not only from eternity, ſpirituality, omnipreſence, power, and knowledge (as without doubt they *are*) but even from *wiſdom* itſelf: which, in my opinion, is a too incorrect and looſe idea. Becauſe *wiſdom* complete and infallible, as it neceſſarily ſuppoſes, according to the general juſt apprehenſion of it, the fixing the beſt and worthieſt *end* of action, and proſecuting the attainment of this end vigorouſly, inflexibly, and everlaſtingly, by the moſt ſuitable and effectual *means*, muſt, of courſe, imply in it all poſſible *rectitude*, and all poſſible *benevolence*, both of intention and operation; and, conſequently, no character can riſe *higher* than that of the ſupremely *wiſe*; nothing can be more *great*, nothing more *indefectible*, nothing more ſublimely *pure* and *excellent*. There is no *imperfection*, but what it muſt *avoid*, no pitch of *moral goodneſs*, but what it muſt certainly *reach*.

HOWEVER, not to inſiſt further on this, it appears, at leaſt, from what has been now offered, that there is a cloſe *connection* between the Divine *wiſdom* and *holineſs*; and that the tranſition in order of diſcourſe, from one to the other, is direct and natural.

FOR,

For by the *holineſs* of God is meant, the *moral rectitude* and *perfection* of his nature; his juſtice, goodneſs, mercy, faithfulneſs, and the like. And it is evident, and, where there is a reflecting and conſiderate mind, acknowledged, that *theſe qualities alone* repreſent him to our thoughts as an amiable being, and are the proper foundation on which to raiſe eſteem, and joyful veneration. Infinite knowledge and power are (as I have had occaſion more than once to obſerve) really aſtoniſhing and awful attributes; and the only thing, that can give us a notion of them as ſolid excellencies, is—their belonging to the character of the *beſt*, as well as the greateſt, of beings, and who, as he cannot *err* in judging of the *reaſon* and *truth* of things, can never *employ* his omniſcience, and almighty energy, but in perfect agreement with the ſtrict principles of *juſtice*, and for the *univerſal good* of his creation.

For if we ſuppoſe theſe properties to be in an *arbitrary* and *malevolent* nature, they raiſe the moſt *terrible* idea, that the human mind can form, and afford no proſpect, but of eternal confuſion and miſery. Such a one, indeed, *can* preſerve the order and harmony of the univerſe; he *can* direct and diſpoſe of things in ſuch a manner, as that they ſhall always conſpire to promote the general good; he *can* make the wiſe, and virtuous, finally and completely happy—but have we any reaſon to believe, that he *will* act, in ſuch a juſt and beneficent manner? On the contrary, is it not natural to ſuppoſe, where there is no *moral perfection*, where infinite knowledge, and power, are joined with *ill diſpoſition* and *cruelty*, that the whole frame of the univerſe muſt be one dark and rueful ſcene of diſtreſs and calamity? And that thoſe who are moſt *virtuous*, moſt *reaſonable*, moſt *righteous* and *benevolent*, and, conſequently, moſt

moſt *oppoſite* to ſuch an infinite *evil* principle, will be, of *all* creatures, the moſt *unhappy?*

As therefore the *holineſs*, or *moral perfection*, of the Supreme Being is abſolutely neceſſary to be acknowledged, in order to our entertaining a lovely idea of him; as, without admitting *this* to be an *eſſential* part of his character, he muſt be the moſt tremendous evil that human imagination can conceive; and we cannot believe his being, and univerſal dominion, without being full of perpetual horror, and loſing all the pleaſure of our own exiſtence; and as we muſt, alſo, loſe all *encouragements* to virtue and piety, to the improving and refining our rational nature, and to the mutual interchangeable offices of equity, and goodneſs; it plainly follows, that it ought to be our principal care, to cultivate exact and worthy notions of GOD in his *moral character*, and impreſs a lively ſenſe of it upon our minds: and that we ſhould eſteem ſuch *knowledge* of the DEITY, eſpecially if it has its due effect and influence upon our practice, as what is vaſtly preferable to any external accompliſhments, to the moſt deſirable and ſplendid diſtinctions in life, and to the moſt excellent natural qualifications. Extremely beautiful and noble therefore, as well as pertinent to the preſent purpoſe, is the ſentiment of the prophet *Jeremiah*, if he be only conſidered in the light of an antient *religious philoſopher—Let not the wiſe* man *glory in his wiſdom, neither let the mighty* man *glory in his might. Let not the rich* man *glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth*, glory in this—*that he underſtandeth and knoweth me, that I* am *the* LORD *who exerciſe* loving-kindneſs, judgment, *and* righteouſneſs, *in the earth: for in* theſe things *I delight, ſaith the* LORD *. And how corrupt in their *principles!* how miſtaken even in point of *intereſt!* are wicked men, who, miſrepreſenting

* Jer. ix. 23, 24.

the *holineſs* of GOD as an object of *terror*, wiſh that he was leſs *perfect* with reſpect to his *moral excellence*; when it is *this alone*, that can render our ſenſe of his over-ruling providence, in any degree, comfortable, and the *want* of it muſt be inevitable diſorder, and ruin, to the creation.

IN truth, there is not only an exact *harmony* between the *natural* and *moral* attributes of GOD, but 'they are inſeparably *con-* '*nected*, and mutually *infer* each other.' From the infinite *knowledge*, and irreſiſtible *power*, of the great governor of the univerſe, and conſequently his conſummate and immutable *happineſs*, we may (I think) certainly deduce his *moral rectitude*; and, moreover, that he is a being of *abſolute* and *neceſſary purity*. For his infinite underſtanding muſt *inform* him, at all times, what is *beſt* and *fitteſt* to be done, and his infinite power *enable* him to *effect* it; and as he can have no *ſelf-intereſt* to miſlead him, or induce him to make a *wrong* choice, it ſeems quite impoſſible, that he ſhould be under the leaſt temptation, to violate the everlaſting invariable *rule* of *right*; but muſt always, neceſſarily, *purſue* what is *fitteſt* and *beſt*. All vice, or moral imperfection, ſpring either from *ignorance*, or *weakneſs*; and therefore can find no place in *him*, whoſe wiſdom is *infinite*, his power *uncontroulable*, and his nature *perfect*. The *fitneſs*, and *beauty*, and *native honour* of juſtice, benevolence, and mercy, muſt always *influence* the *Divine* mind, unclouded and undepraved by paſſion, to *chooſe* and *purſue* thoſe; and the intrinſic *baſeneſs* and *malignity* of tyranny, cruelty, and revenge, determine it to an utter and eternal *abhorrence* of *theſe*: ſince it is impoſſible, that he ſhould ſuffer any diminution of his happineſs, by *adhering* ſteddily to the reaſon of things, or receive the leaſt pleaſure, or advantage, by *departing*, in any inſtance, from it.

4

AND

And to theſe clear proofs of the abſolute and unchangeable *holineſs* of God, drawn from the *neceſſary connection*, that there is, between his *natural* and *moral* perfections, permit me to add—that *this*, as well as his *wiſdom* and *power*, appears moſt evidently, and impreſſed in lively characters, in the external diſpoſition and frame of things. For the *univerſal* conſtitution is ſo fixed, that holineſs, or moral rectitude, is the indiſpenſable *duty* of all reaſonable beings. *Mankind*, in particular, are endowed with ſuch refined faculties, that it is abſolutely *neceſſary* to *their* perfection, and happineſs. So that, while the *preſent* ſcheme ſubſiſts, all the branches of *virtue* muſt *unalterably* oblige; ſince they reſult uniformly, and invariably, from the *nature* of things, and are the only *poſſible* means to preſerve the *beauty*, and *regular order*, of the moral creation. And this demonſtrates the abſolute perfection, and purity, of the great original and author of nature. 'For if, from the viſible *diſplays* and reſplendent *marks* of wiſdom and power, that 'are found in the univerſe, we juſtly infer, that it was at firſt 'formed, and is continually upheld and governed, by a *wiſe* and '*powerful* being; we ought, upon the ſame general principle and 'ground of reaſon, to conclude (ſince the *rules* of virtue, neceſſarily ariſing from that order, and thoſe mutual references of things, 'which he originally contrived and ſettled, are, beyond contradiction, *his laws*) that he is, in the higheſt degree of luſtre and excellence, a *moral*, or *holy*, being:' one whoſe *nature* is, like the eternal and immutable *ſtandard* of *right*, perfect, who is *righteous in all his ways*, and *holy in all his works*, and has the moſt ſtrong, and irreconcileable, *averſion* to all ſin and impurity.

And it is upon the account of this *ſupreme*, and *neceſſary*, *rectitude* of his eſſential being, incapable of the leaſt increaſe, or of

gaining an additional ſtrength and confirmation by any acquired habits, that the doctrine of *revealed religion*, correſponding entirely with the primitive and pureſt light of nature, repreſents to us a *tranſcendent* ſenſe, in which the character of *holy* is to be aſcribed to GOD *alone*, his *ſingular* and *incommunicable* attribute. So that the moſt exalted of *derived* beings are, in compariſon of his bright and ſpotleſs perfection, tainted and impure: becauſe he poſſeſſes his rectitude of nature *ſelf-originately*, and *independently*; whereas all *created* intelligences, though according to their implanted capacities, and their rank of exiſtence, their moral perfection may be *abſolute*, muſt always have, before them, a large *ſcope* for *progreſſive* improvement. 'And this will *for ever* (place them even at the 'very *ſummit*, and *head* of the creation) produce a *poſſibility* of 'their *declining* from the rectitude of their moral powers, as well 'as of their *advancing* to greater heighths. All *finite* natures 'muſt, in the abſtract reaſon of things, be capable of a *weak* and '*imperfect* conduct. It may indeed be a great *improbability*, that 'they *will* act thus, but it is not ſtrictly *impoſſible*, that they *ſhould*: 'and *unchangeable* excellence of moral character is the peculiar, and 'ſole, prerogative of the infinite creator and ſource of being.'

AND therefore, moſt agreeably to the univerſal ſenſe and voice of reaſon, *revelation* deſcribes him in the lofty ſtile of one *glorious in holineſs**, and *of purer eyes than to* behold *iniquity* †, and who *cannot* ſo much as be tempted *with evil* ‡: that we may entertain the moſt *ſublime* idea of him, that it is poſſible for the human underſtanding to conceive, and ſeparate from him every thing, that has the leaſt appearance of a *ſtain* or *blemiſh*. And becauſe he *is* abſolute *light*, *in* whom there is no ſhade, no darkneſs *at all* ‖; a being neceſſarily remote from all folly, weakneſs, and vice; he is repre-

* Exod. xv. 11. † Hab. i. 13. ‡ Jam. i. 13. ‖ 1 John i. 5.

ſented in the book of *Job*, as *charging his* angels *with* folly, and even *the* heavens *are not* clean *in his ſight* *—*Who ſhall not*, therefore, *fear thee, O* LORD, *and* glorify *thy name* †?

LET me only add to all this, that the particular attributes of GOD affect the minds of men variouſly, and have a different influence on the leading paſſions of the ſoul. His *goodneſs* attracts our ſoft and generous affections, our eſteem, love, and delightful admiration; his *faithfulneſs* is the foundation of our hope; his *juſtice in general*, of a ſecurity againſt any dangerous deceit, or unmerited evil—It alſo repreſents him as cloathed with terror, to awaken the ſtubborn and impenitent offender. And if the force of theſe perfections is great, when they are *ſeverally* conſidered, how efficacious muſt they be in their *union*; and when they are *collected* together, to form *one* moſt eſtimable, moſt adorable, moſt awful *moral character*? They, then, certainly include *every motive* to a filial and reverential love of the DEITY, to every rational office of piety, to every natural and indiſpenſable act of virtue, that can be deſcribed, or imagined; and muſt be ſufficient to leave all the impious, all the vicious, abſolutely without excuſe.

CONCERNING the particular attribute of the *Divine juſtice*, I need ſay but little; becauſe there is no point, in which mankind have more univerſally agreed, than in the *general nature* of *juſtice*, or where their notions, upon the whole, ſeem to be leſs clouded and confuſed. The plain definition of it is this, 'to do *no wrong* to *any*, and to render to *all* their *dues*, and what they can ſtrictly *claim*, without *diſtinction*, or *reſpect*, of *perſons*.' This takes in the whole of it, with all its branches. And with reſpect to the *juſtice* of GOD, in particular—it conſiſts 'in alloting to all *innocent*

* Job iv. 13. & xv. 15. † Rev. xv. 4.

'beings, at *leaſt*, ſo much more *happineſs* than *miſery* upon the 'whole, as will render their exiſtence *eligible*, and not *puniſhing* 'the guilty, beyond what their offences deſerve: in not determin- 'ing abſolutely the *miſery* of any, nor propoſing its favours upon '*impracticable conditions*: in *governing* his creatures by laws ſuited 'to their *natures*, *abilities*, and *circumſtances*, and *judging* them '*impartially*.' And whoever aſſerts the contrary, pays the DEITY no more, than a mere formal *compliment* of juſtice, but leaves him, in reality, branded and marked out a *tyrant*. And the *proofs*, of this attribute, are neceſſarily included in *thoſe* of the abſolute *moral rectitude* of GOD; as well as in the *proofs*, which are deſigned to follow in the next chapter, of his perfect *goodneſs*, of which *juſtice* is a lower, but inſeparable, *part*; ſince, without it, *true benevolence* of nature can no where ſubſiſt.

LET me only add, that the *general principles* of juſtice are *fixed* and *abſolute*, and muſt hold for ever the *ſame*, with reſpect to GOD and *man*. And what are the *conſequences* of not allowing this? Moſt frightful:—the utter ruin of religion, and ſubverſion of all morality; ſince then juſtice itſelf will have no *determinate idea*, but be a mere empty name. And, beſides, how ſhall we know, how can we pretend to aſſert, that the DEITY is *juſt*, or attempt to demonſtrate that this *perfection* eſſentially belongs to him, if we have no *conception* of his juſtice? How can we have the leaſt probability, what ſcheme of religion is *worthy* of him, or what courſe of practice will be *acceptable* to him? If GOD may be *juſt*, while he acts like men who are *unjuſt*, there is no confiding in his *promiſes*, no dependance on his moſt ſolemn *declarations*; there is no rule of *duty*, no hope of *mercy*, no expectation of *happineſs*, left for mankind. Fix therefore upon this, or there can be no virtue, no religion, no comfort, that *juſtice* is, in all the parts of it, a

3 fixed,

fixed invariable point; and though circumſtances may require different *acts* of equitable *diſtribution*, or *judgment*, yet the general *rule* is inviolably the ſame, with reſpect to *all* intelligent natures without exception.—Otherwiſe the diſtinction of the higheſt, above all other ſubordinate powers, can only be, to be the *worſt* and moſt *abhorred* beings in the univerſe; as having a right to be *licentious* and *oppreſſive*.

THE uſes to be made, of the foregoing diſcourſe, are thoſe which follow.

IN the FIRST place, the conſideration of GOD's ſpotleſs and unchangeable *purity* ſhould raiſe, in our minds, a ſerious reverence of him, and a fear to offend him. For can we, if we really believe, that we are always under the intimate view and inſpection of an abſolutely *perfect* being, allow ourſelves in the gratification of unreaſonable and extravagant paſſions; or in any practices, which reaſon condemns, as unſuitable to the dignity of our nature, and a diſgrace to our moral powers! The *preſence* of a *man* like ourſelves, infinitely *mean* in compariſon of GOD, when ſurrounded with his moſt diſtinguiſhed glories; the preſence, I ſay, even of ſuch a one (our *equal* in place and order of nature) who is remarkable for the *piety* and *ſtrict virtue* of his life, will, while we have any unextinguiſhed ſenſe of *ſhame* in us, reſtrain from *indecent* and *diſhonourable* actions. Surely, then, we ought to be much more ſolicitous not to loſe the good opinion of that *all-perfect* being, whoſe *judgment* is always *accurate* and *infallible*; and whoſe *approbation* will redound infinitely more to our *honour*, than the eſteem of all our fellow-creatures, and their moſt magnificent and united applauſes. This thought *alone*, without regarding the *conſequences* of our being under the immediate eye of the univerſal Creator,

Creator, and ſubject to his righteous judgment, is *ſufficient* to determine every reaſonable mind, to conduct itſelf, in all circumſtances, with the exacteſt *decorum* and *regularity*. But the argument, for a circumſpect and cautious virtue, will be of much greater *weight*, when we conſider farther, that, becauſe of his immutable purity, he muſt be highly *diſpleaſed* with our follies and vices: HE, I ſay, who has the fate of every individual man, of nations, of the whole extent of nature, under his ſole *controul*, and is the entire *arbiter* both of our happineſs and miſery.

SECONDLY, From the neceſſary *purity*, and abſolute *moral perfection*, of the Supreme Being we learn, that he cannot be the *author* of ſin; nor, in the leaſt degree, *incite* and *prompt* any of his creatures, to the commiſſion of it: and particularly, that 'he can-'not have *forced*, upon any of them, an *evil nature*, neceſſarily 'tending to vice and wickedneſs.'

OF unavoidable conſequence, therefore, 'man is, by nature, '*free*, at leaſt with reſpect to *evil actions*; which are, entirely ow-'ing to his own *wilful* indulgence of irregular appetites. For it 'is as manifeſt, that the immoralities of mankind cannot ariſe 'from the original *divine* frame, and direction, of their *nature*, 'as it is that GOD is ſupremely and unalterably good.' And accordingly *this*, which is the only *rational* account, of the *origin* and *progreſs* of *moral evil*, is expreſſibly aſſerted, by St. *James*, to be the true *ſcriptural* account, in the following very remarkable paſſage—*Let no man ſay, when he is tempted, I am* tempted *of* GOD: *for* GOD *cannot be* tempted *with evil, neither* tempteth *he any man: But every man is* tempted, *when he is drawn away of* his own *luſts, and enticed* *.

* Jam. i. 13, 14.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, we ought to look upon *holineſs*, as the chief *excellency* of the *human* nature, as it is the higheſt *glory* of the divine: And, as the unſpotted *purity* of GOD is the main foundation of his conſummate *happineſs*, the ſame moral quality in *kind*, tho' the *degree* of it be inimitable, muſt be for ever neceſſary, in order to *our* happineſs, and to *that* of the whole intelligent creation.

FROM admitting the ſame principle, *viz.* that there exiſts an abſolute and unſullied *character* of *moral excellence*, we may certainly conclude, that we not only offend him, and incur the dreadful conſequences of his diſpleaſure, when we give the reins to inordinate deſire, and live in a courſe of vice, *ourſelves*; but, alſo, when we prompt, and entice, any of our *fellow-creatures* to the commiſſion of it. This, if it be only for the ſake of *ſociety* and *communion* in wickedneſs, and becauſe we cannot have ſo high a reliſh of our pleaſures *alone*, denotes a mind dead to all ſentiments of *moral duty*, and indeed, in a great meaſure, loſt even to *thought* itſelf; that can, without remorſe, propagate the moſt loathſome and deadly *infection*, of which human nature is ſuſceptible. But if it ſprings from a temper, that has contracted a *friendſhip* for *vice itſelf*, and *delights* in it, for its *own ſake*; the worſt beings in the univerſe, *i. e.* in our common apprehenſion, the devils themſelves, cannot be *more* in *diſpoſition*, and perhaps ſeldom are, in *fact*, ſo degenerate.

IN the LAST place, we learn, from what has now been diſcourſed, not only our obligation to univerſal *purity* of *thought*, and *rectitude* of *life*, but to one particular, and moſt important, branch of our moral duty; and that is, the practice of ſtrict and impartial *juſtice*, in all the concerns and offices of life: Becauſe the

the ſupreme LORD, who is *righteous in all his ways*, muſt neceſſarily abhor all fraud in *commerce*, all aſperſions thrown upon *innocent* and *worthy* characters, and all malicious aggravations even of *real faults*. We ſhall therefore, if we have any ſerious view to his approbation, be ſcrupulouſly nice in *rendering* to *all* their due, whether *ſtrangers*, *friends*, or *enemies*. And, that we may conform to the model of GOD's perfect *rule*, it is highly neceſſary, that in all caſes of *right* which come before us, whether as placed in ſtations of *civil authority*, or as *parents*, and *maſters* of families, we decide as exactly as poſſible according to *reaſon*, and the real *merit* of things; being neither influenced by *affection*, nor ſowred by *paſſion*, nor blinded by *prejudice*, neither corrupted by the love of *ſordid gain*, nor tranſported by *anger*, and *revenge*. The ultimate view of all our meditations, on the *perfections* of GOD, ſhould be, to form us to a *divine reſemblance*—If this be the event, even *imperfect* knowledge is *honourable:* If not, the moſt *exact* and *accompliſhed* is much more *ignominious* than *ſavage ignorance* itſelf, and will, in its conſequences, be inexpreſſibly *fatal.*

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

Which treats of the goodneſs *of* God; *and anſwers the principal* objections, *that have been urged againſt it.*

THE *goodneſs* of God opens the brighteſt and moſt delightful ſcene, that can poſſibly be preſented to the view of reaſon; a ſcene as full of *wonders* as thoſe of the divine wiſdom or power, but much more agreeably *tranſporting*, and *ſingly* adapted to touch, and animate, the more *refined* and *ingenuous* affections of human nature. Eternity, ſelf-exiſtence, and immenſity, *aſtoniſh*; abſtracted power is *dreadful*; mere juſtice has ſomewhat of a *ſevere* and *rigid* aſpect: And even infinite wiſdom, as involving, in its moſt enlarged and juſt idea, complete moral rectitude, is a reverend awful ſubject, rendered *pleaſing* and *encouraging* to the mind of man, chiefly by this thought, that *goodneſs* is an eſſential, and the moſt illuſtrious, part of it. So that nothing can reconcile us, to a *calm* and *free* contemplation of any *other* of the attributes of the DEITY, but this, that they are all *ſubſervient* to the diſpoſitions and ſchemes of *true goodneſs*; of goodneſs, not conſidered as a mechanical propenſion, and a blind undiſtinguiſhing impulſe, but as a *real perfection*; and that they may be all uſed as *deſcriptions*, and, as it were, *attributes* of goodneſs. So that we may be allowed to ſay of God, 'That it is not his eternity, that repreſents him to us 'as ſupremely perfect, but his *eternal goodneſs*; not his immenſity, 'but his *omnipreſent*, *efficacious*, and *all-animating goodneſs*; not 'his ſtrict, but his *mild*, *gracious*, and *moderating* juſtice; not

'his abſolute infinity, but his *unbounded mercy*; not his irreſtible 'power, but his *omnipotent benevolence*; not his unerring ſkill 'and contrivance, but its being *neceſſarily* exerted, for the pro-'duction of what is *beſt* upon the whole.'

GOODNESS therefore, as intimately united, and connected, with all the other perfections of the DEITY, is their light, their lovelineſs, and the point of matchleſs glory, in which they ultimately center. It invigorates the ſoul of man, enforces virtue from a principle of gratitude, inſpires a generous ardour and delight in doing good, and aſſures us of the reward of it. For who can imitate the beſt of all *beings*, by endeavouring to be among the *beſt* of all *men*, without being certain of GOD's approbation and peculiar complacency, from which happineſs is eternally inſeparable! This is the *divine character*, that cheriſhes, and warms, and ſtrengthens, and ſtamps an honour upon, all *inferior benevolence*; it teaches us, that univerſal benevolence is, moſt ſtrictly, *humanity*, and the inviolable *law* of our nature. This is that *divine character*, which prompts us, moſt powerfully, to the higheſt refinement of our *moral* and *ſocial* powers; which 'communicates, and ſupplies, uni-'verſal life to the *creation*, inexpreſſible joy to the *virtuous*, the 'ſtrongeſt arguments for a reformation of manners to the *degene-'rate*, confidence of mercy to the *penitent*, and calm reſignation, 'and hope, to the *afflicted*.'

As there is no perfection of the DEITY ſo amiable, there is ſcarce any ſo clearly demonſtrated, as that of his univerſal benevolence; and yet there is none, that has been more *objected* againſt in all ages: though, in the viſible and unlimited manifeſtations of it, it be ſufficient, and one would imagine ſhould prove, in fact, ſufficient to ſilence all cavils, yet diſputes about it have been endleſs. — Such has been the preſumption, pride, and perverſe-

neſs of *man*. He feels the kindly influences of goodneſs every moment, is encompaſſed, enlivened, and comforted by it, and yet pretends to *ſee* it *not*. Without it, he muſt either have been nothing, or a being abſolutely miſerable, but ſtill refuſes to *acknowledge* it. He enjoys numberleſs generous, and unmerited, favours, the free communications of the munificent parent of good, and yet raiſes and encourages *doubts* concerning the goodneſs of their *author*, and the *ſource* from whence they ſpring. This ariſes from various cauſes, not one of which is to the *honour* of mankind; but they are all plain, and ſtrong, arguments of the depraved and corrupt ſtate of human nature; of its diminutive *reaſon*, its blind *preposſeſſions*, its confuſed *conceptions*, and the force of its *evil habits*.

SOME, for example, 'through an unquiet agitation and peeviſh-'neſs of temper, are diſſatisfied with *themſelves*, with *nature*, and 'with GOD.' They would have been differently *formed*, or differently *ſituated*, from what they find they are; and therefore conclude, that ſo it *ought* to have been. They ruſh to the concluſion at once, prompted and urged by diſcontent, without enquiring ſedately and impartially into the reaſons, the uſes, the wiſe and gracious purpoſes, of the *preſent* conſtitution. They frame *wild* and *imaginary* ſchemes of good, which, they preſume, the father of the univerſe, if abſolute and ſupreme in benevolence, was bound to *execute*. They introduce, by their wrong conduct, anxiety, diſappointment, and ſhame, and in indulging inſtincts of *ſenſe*, and baſe *appetite*, make as it were various raſh *experiments* of *miſery*; and, then, moſt inſolently blame the creator of the world, becauſe they ſuffer by departing from *nature*, and violating its eſtabliſhed *laws*: *i. e.* in other words, 'becauſe they are *miſerable* through *their own* fault, when *he* intended they ſhould be *happy*.'

OTHERS, again, commence cavillers againſt the goodneſs of GOD, which is inſcribed all over the external face of nature, and ſtrikes their ſenſes, every-where, in the *frame* aud *tendency* of the original *divine* conſtitution (though not alike in *particular* objects, which may ſpring, altogether, from cauſes *unnatural*) they object, I ſay, againſt the goodneſs of GOD, from their ignorance of 'the *views* of providence in *ſingle facts*, and of the *tendency* of 'the *particulars* ſeemingly diſagreeable, after a vaſt ſcene of interven-'ing effects of *various* aſpects, to produce *good*, and the *greateſt* 'good.'

BUT how ſhould *man* be capable of thoroughly underſtanding, and tracing, this *chain* through every *link*, when, perhaps, the greateſt part of it is hid in dark futurity, beyond his utmoſt penetration and compaſs of enquiry; and which his faculties could not poſſibly comprehend, in their entire ſcope and connection, even though we ſhould allow (which is a ſuppoſition quite prodigious) that every ſingle fact, conſtituting the *order* of this immenſe government, might be preſented to his view. For, even then, it muſt be by a gradual *train* and *ſucceſſion* of ideas, the moſt capacious human underſtanding being of too narrow and diſproportioned limits, to ſurvey all at *once*. Before the *laſt* part, therefore, is revealed to him, he will neceſſarily loſe all notion of the *firſt*; his mind can only be filled with imperfect *traces*; and the *images* being crouded, and promiſcuouſly blended together, within the extent of ſo ſcanty a capacity, what can be the reſult, but ignorance and utter confuſion? What clear and certain judgment, can we imagine, will be formed? Can the operations of *perfect*, and *unbounded*, reaſon be completely ſcanned by the *firſt* ſketches, the *firſt* irradiations, the *loweſt* meaſures of reaſon? It is in nature as

 abſurd,

abſurd, as it would be to aſſert, that where the abilities for underſtanding are infinitely *unequal*, there may, ſtill, be *equal* knowledge.

'MAN, indeed, has faculties ſuited to his *rank*, and perfect in 'their *kind*.' He can find out *enough* of the ways of GOD, to direct and lead to him; to inſtruct him in GOD's eſſential attributes; *ſufficient* for his perfection, and to fill up his own proper ſphere both of duty, and happineſs.—And what would he *more?* Would he ſtart out *beyond* his preſcribed, and appointed, *line* of being? Would he examine, would he judge, and determine, *beyond* the utmoſt *reach* of his powers? Inſtead of being contented with *human* knowledge, would he, by arrogant imagination, and bewildered dark conjectures, ſupply the want of *angelical?* Would he aſpire even to the *divine?*—Thus he acts, when he pretends, in this way, to cenſure any of the works that GOD has wrought; in the way, I mean, 'of ſubſiſting, in the room of ſeveral parts of 'exiſting nature, a *wiſer* and more *effectual* method of communi-'cating the *greateſt good* upon the whole.' He may *diſcern*, indeed, what general methods of conduct are equal, and good, or unjuſt, and unbenevolent. This is ſaying no more, than that he is capable of forming *general ideas* both of *juſtice*, and *goodneſs*, as to which, he is, in the holy ſcriptures, more than once appealed to; but never whether a particular appointment, in the model of creation, be the *fitteſt medium* of conveying, and eſtabliſhing, *univerſal good*.

I SHALL only add, to the remarks already made, that the chief and moſt prevailing cauſe of objections, or ſcruples, with reſpect to the abſolute goodneſs of the DEITY, is this, that the bulk of mankind have formed no diſtinct and rational conception of *goodneſs*

neſs itſelf; but imagine it to be a kind of paſſion, a ſtrong overbearing uncontroulable impulſe, that tranſports and hurries on to the imparting *pleaſure*, and preventing *pain*, without any deliberation or wiſdom: whereas *good*, blindly and injudiciouſly conferred, may, in its conſequences, be *real evil*. And if this be their general idea of *goodneſs*, what muſt be their idea of *abſolute goodneſs?* It will, moſt certainly, blot out *wiſdom* altogether, and ſubvert *juſtice*.

AND as they are equally defective in having clearly fixed, what may *properly* and *fairly* be concluded from the infinite benevolence of GOD, and what are *ſpurious* and *unnatural* inferences; this is ſufficient to account for all their *doubts*, all their *cavils*, and, upon the ſame foundation, it will be no wonder if they remain, and are multiplied, to eternity. They will imagine ſome particular operations to be *acts* of goodneſs, and eſſential *illuſtrations* of it, that would, upon the whole, be *cruelty*; and others to argue a *defect* of goodneſs, that will be found, in the final reſult of nature and providence, to be the moſt glorious diſplays of it. They are, therefore, fundamentally wrong, and deeply intangled in error, and almoſt as incapable in this ſtate of mind, this perplexity and confuſion of thought, to decide upon the point of *ſupreme benevolence*, as if they were naturally deſtitute of underſtanding. In the further diſcuſſion of this great and important ſubject, I ſhall endeavour,

FIRST, To eſtabliſh, and aſcertain, the *general idea* of *goodneſs*, and of *perfect goodneſs*.

SECONDLY, To ſhew what evidences and demonſtrations there are, from *reaſon*, that GOD is a being *abſolutely good*.

AND,

AND, THIRDLY, To anſwer the chief of the *objections*, that have ever been urged, againſt this moſt glorious attribute of the DEITY.

THE FIRST point, neceſſary to be fixed, is—What is the *general idea* of *goodneſs*, and of *perfect goodneſs*. 'Goodneſs is that 'principle, in intelligent natures, by which they are *diſpoſed* and '*prompted* to communicate, and diffuſe, *happineſs*.' It is ever ſuppoſed to be a *voluntary* principle, or, at leaſt, to be under the direction of *reaſon* as to its *exerciſe*. Upon which account, the *inſtincts* of mere animals, to tenderneſs and beneficent offices, are never reckoned to be *moral* qualities, or excellencies of private character, as *goodneſs* is always eſtimated: they repreſent to us nothing *meritorious* in them; but are adored as diſplays of the goodneſs of the Creator, *mechanically*, and *paſſively*, exerted in their frame. If *goodneſs*, therefore, be a kind of inſtinct, (as ſome ſeem to think) or call it a natural propenſion and diſpoſition in the DEITY, it can be no otherwiſe *laudable*, than as it is with *choice* and *approbation*, and under the conduct of wiſdom cloſely attending it in every ſtep, exerted.

So that GOD's abſolute benevolence being a moral character, and the very idea of moral character being, in itſelf, abſurd and inconſiſtent, without the exerciſe and overſight of reaſon, the true definition of it can be only this—'that it is, in him, a conſtant and im-'mutable *diſpoſition* to diſpenſe the *wiſeſt* and *fitteſt*, which is the 'ſame, where there is infinite intelligence, as *all poſſible* good, to 'the *whole*, and to every *individual part* of the creation.' What that is *preciſely* we cannot comprehend, without being poſſeſſed of boundleſs wiſdom; and therefore ſhould, in particular caſes, however intricate, be always *modeſt* and *diffident*.

GOD

GOD is not obliged to treat *all* capacities, *all* improvements in knowledge, and moral rectitude, *alike*: wiſdom forbids it; equity renounces it; and *impartial* diſtribution of favours, in the governor and judge of the whole univerſe, is utterly inconſiſtent with it.—And it will be hereafter ſhewn, that he is not obliged to make *all* his creatures, in their original formation, *equal*.

THE *goodneſs* of GOD, therefore, abſolutely *unlimited* but by reaſon and truth, and the unalterable order of things, can, in no other way, be *properly* diſplayed—but 'by diſtributing *good* in *proportion* 'to the *capacity*, and *merit*, and, conſequently, to the *various ca-* 'pacities, and *different merits*, of the dependent beings who are 'the recipients of good; and by extracting the *utmoſt good* from 'the *whole*, whatever it be.'

IF the infinite being was not, unalterably bound to create *one* ſpecies of beings *only* (which would have *limited* the exertions of his *goodneſs*) there muſt of courſe be a *diverſity* as to the *degrees* of *happineſs*. And if we allow of *any* diverſity at all, where, or how, can it in reaſon be bounded? What other *poſſible* limit, can we affix and ſet to it, but this—'that the *primitive conſtitution*, and the '*laws* ordained for each particular ſpecies, ſhould have a manifeſt '*tendency* to *good* upon the *whole*?' And if a variety be admitted, as it muſt be upon the force of this argument, which, I think, is unanſwerable, the only poſſible happineſs that can be, *wiſely*, diſtributed, is a *ſuitable* degree of good to *all*, according to their *original powers*, their intellectual improvements, and moral qualifications; and the communicating *more* would be againſt the adjuſted proportion of things, and contrary to immutable reaſon. So that, upon the whole, the deſcription, which I have before given, of the *moſt*

perfect

perfect goodneſs is the only *rational* idea of it, that can be entertained; *viz.* 'that it communicates *all* the *good*, not that is in re-'ſpect of *natural power*, but only *all* that is in *reaſon* poſſible; 'i. e. all *proper* and *expedient* good.' This thought alone will go a great way, in removing all objections againſt the infinity of the *divine* benevolence, ſo far as moral characters may be denominated infinite: and I deſire that it may be particularly noted, and attentively conſidered, for the ſake of the application, which I ſhall make of it hereafter.

LET me add to all this, that *juſtice* and *goodneſs* are fitly treated as *diſtinct* ſubjects, though they differ not ſo properly in *kind*, as in *degree*. *Juſtice* is the communication of *good*, but it is of a good *merited*, and to which there is an *abſolute right* of *claim*. *Juſtice* is, in ſome degree, an *intereſted* principle, the right to univerſal property, and conſequently our own right, depends on the mutual and impartial exerciſe of it; but true *benevolence* is a more *pure* and *ſublime* principle, abſtracted from *perſonal* views, and aims at the happineſs of others, from the *ſole motive* of *doing good*. *Thus*, at leaſt it muſt be, in the original fountain and ſource of good, whoſe eſſential and immutable enjoyments are included within himſelf. And the higher we raiſe our benevolence, above all mixtures of *ſelfiſhneſs* and *private gratification*, the more do we adorn and dignify it, and honour human nature.

OFFICES of kindneſs, and compaſſionate aſſiſtance, are indeed, in a general way, *due* from men to men; but not, ſo *preciſely*, from *one* individual man to *another*, as that he can certainly fix the *obligation*; an obligation to *him ſingly*, and *excluſive* of *other* objects. In matters of *equity*, he has an immediate demand, and to a certain degree, upon *me* in *perſon*; with reſpect to offices of *goodneſs*,

his claim is only *general*, as a partaker in common humanity. This I am at liberty to canvaſs, to diſpute, to diſallow; rejecting *him*, and preferring *other* objects, when it appears, to the unprejudiced judgment of my own mind, to be moſt ſubſervient to *univerſal benevolence*. And the diſtinction of theſe two characters, being founded in nature, muſt be equally ſolid with reſpect to GOD, as *man*. For how *little* of what they actually *enjoy*, and how much *leſs* of what they *hope* for, could his creatures ſtrictly *demand?* Let them exhibit their full *claim* of *equity* exaggerated, and amplified to the utmoſt, and then ſee how far *ſhort* it would fall of the liberal, and boundleſs, diffuſions of GOD's paternal and unſollicited *goodneſs*. From the *former*, ſtrictly conſidered, they have very little to hope; from the *latter*, there is nothing that is truly, and in the judgment of unerring wiſdom, *good*, but what, in proportion to their capacities, they may reaſonably expect. And this leads me to

THE SECOND head of inquiry, which was to point out what evidences and demonſtrations there are, from reaſon and the nature of things, that GOD is a being *abſolutely good*. This point, as was obſerved before, has been greatly darkened by the ignorance and pride, but, chiefly, by the irregularities, and various wild diſorders, of mankind; which have infinitely multiplied the train of *human miſeries*, and, thereby, have eclipſed the *beauty* and *glory* of GOD's creation, and thoſe ſhining marks of *benevolence* and *gracious diſpoſition*, that would, otherwiſe, appear in all the parts of it. Let us, however, proceed to conſider the *evidences* of ſupreme goodneſs, that are ſtill ſtrongly concluſive and unanſwerable.

AND the FIRST of theſe is of a more abſtract nature, but perfectly intelligible to common capacities of mind, that exert themſelves

ſelves with any degree of attention. The ſubſtance of it is as follows—There is a natural, and unalterable, *difference* in *actions*, and *characters*. *Right* and *wrong* are, in general, eſſentially *diſtinct*. Neither human cuſtoms, nor prevailing opinions, nor the determination of the Supreme Being himſelf (was it poſſible for him to decide ſo perverſely) can *confound* their *ſeparate* natures; or make them *unite*, and abſolutely *coincide*, in one abſtract *uniform idea*. *Juſt* and *unjuſt*, for inſtance, *benevolence* and *cruelty*, in defiance of all will, and all power, will remain eternally *different*, eternal *contrarieties*. They form *oppoſite characters*, immutably oppoſite.

'THE *ſame judgment* therefore (if it be a true and right judg-
'ment) though merely *ſpeculative*, cannot poſſibly be formed with
'reſpect to *both*, becauſe they are repugnant to each other;' and unleſs direct contradictions are *equally* true, or muſt, at leaſt, have an *equal appearance* of truth to *all degrees* of intelligence: which is, in effect, reducing the *Divine intelligence* itſelf, to a ſtate of unilluminated and neceſſary error. From whence it undeniably follows, 'that they muſt be ranged under a quite *different eſtimate*
'by reaſon, and eſpecially by ſupreme reaſon, as *moral characters*.'

AND now the whole queſtion being reduced to this ſingle point, which is moſt *eligible*—benevolence, or ſelfiſhneſs—mercy, or cruelty—to be the author of all *expedient good*, or the cauſe of *unneceſſary miſery*—it muſt, I preſume, be eaſily decided, to the univerſal conviction of mankind. For is it poſſible for us to heſitate one moment (when the only controverſy is, which is the moſt *eſtimable* character, to do good, or to do evil) about *preferring* the *beneficent* character? We *feel* the *preference* of pleaſure to pain: we know that the one, with reſpect to all *ſenſitive* natures, is to be

choſen before the other. And can we poſſibly ſtick, at *preferring* the *communication* of *pleaſure* to all our fellow-creatures, when we are ſure that it is abſolutely *beſt?* Reaſonable nature could not ſcruple it, had it not one implanted *inſtinct*; but was directed purely, and ſolely, by an *intellectual* influence.

'FOR an *approbation* of a *malicious* diſpoſition and practice, to 'the *diſclaiming* and *rejecting* its repugnant character of *goodneſs*, 'is as much an error in *ſpeculation*, as it is contrary to any ſup-'poſed *biaſſes* and *tendencies* of nature: it can, therefore, never 'take place in GOD, conſidered, merely, as the ſupreme and moſt 'perfect *intelligence*.' The characters, as has been more than once obſerved, being irreconcileably oppoſite, *one* of the *two* muſt be cultivated, purſued, and made the *ultimate ſcope* of action, or there muſt be an everlaſting ſtop put to all *divine*, and *human*, operations: but if beneficence be not, in reaſon, the moſt excellent, GOD's ſupreme perfection, which reſults chiefly from his goodneſs, is not an adorable attribute; nothing more adorable, in the nature of things, than it would have been, had he been, eſſentially, the ſcourge and plague of the creation. And had mankind derived, from ſuch an evil principle, *malevolent inſtincts* and *approbations*, they might as juſtly have fallen proſtrate, with veneration, before the throne of *cruelty*, as they now preſent their *mere complements* of reſpect, upon the preſent ſuppoſition, to *infinite goodneſs*.

To ſum up the whole argument more conciſely, and in a ſomewhat different form—'There is an eſſential and unalterable *di-'ſtinction*, and *oppoſition* in *nature*, between *beneficence*, and '*cruelty*: The perfectly exact *degrees* of difference, and oppoſi-'tion, in the ſeveral characters, the infinite author of nature, muſt 'infallibly *diſcern*: He muſt know *happineſs* to be preferable,

'upon

'upon the *whole*, to *miſery*; and, conſequently, that the *commu-*
'*nication* of happineſs upon the *whole* is, in eternal and immu-
'table reaſon, more *eligible* than the *diſtribution* of miſery: He
'has no *dependencies*; no *ſeparate* intereſt from that of the *uni-*
'*verſal* good: He has, therefore, *every poſſible motive* to *purſue*
'it; he can have *no motive*, even, to *neglect* it: The conſequence
'of which muſt be, that he *does* purſue it invariably; that, under
'the conduct of ſupreme wiſdom, he *can never*, in the minuteſt
'inſtance, deviate from it; which is the very ſame thing with
'aſſerting, that he is poſſeſſed of *abſolute* and *immutable goodneſs*.'
This, I apprehend, to be ſuch a complete and manifeſt proof of the attribute of the DEITY, now under conſideration, as nothing can ſhake, or invalidate; a proof deduced from reaſon alone, and which muſt, therefore, ſtand firm for ever.

BUT, farther, that there are *ſcattered* communications of good in the univerſe, no man however prejudiced, or diſcontented with the frame of nature, can poſſibly deny: That there are even ample proviſions for happineſs, and illuſtrious marks of a generous and diffuſive benevolence, no *moderate ſceptic* will ſcruple to allow. And, from theſe *appearances* of *good*, we may raiſe an argument, of great weight, for the abſolute goodneſs of the creator. For why ſhould he diſpenſe *any good at all*, unleſs it were from the eſſential goodneſs, from the approved and voluntary benevolence, of his nature? Were the DEITY an *evil* being, we could in reaſon expect to find nothing, but *appearances* of *miſery* in the world. For, upon this horrid ſuppoſition, his inclination, his prevailing propenſion of nature, is to communicate *evil*; whence then ariſe thoſe diſplays of *goodneſs*, that render human life, in the opinion of almoſt all, *eligible*, nay an object of moſt *cloſe* and *fond affection*? Let the man that contends, for the *malignity* of the ſupreme prin-

principle, try to ſolvve this inexplicable problem, and he will find himſelf totally confounded.

HE *has* nothing elſe to have recourſe to but this—'that as the 'experience of *pain* gives a quicker and ſtronger *reliſh* of pleaſure, 'ſo a ſlight and ſuperficial *taſte* of *good* may prove, in the end, 'an enhauncement and *aggravation* of *evil*.' To which it is obvious to reply, 'that a preceding *ſenſe* of *miſery* is not abſolutely 'neceſſary to the complete enjoyment of happineſs:' For then it muſt be concluded (contrary to what is ſuppoſed, and allowed, on all ſides) that GOD *himſelf* is not conſummately happy, becauſe he never was, nor could be, in any degree *miſerable*. All *other* beings, therefore, might in nature, without including the wiſe purpoſes of moral government, alſo have been happy, though they had *never* been calamitous: They might, likewiſe, have been proportionably miſerable, without having experienced *any thing*, but miſery. Beſides the orders of beings, that *aſcend* from *miſery* to happineſs, are the *loweſt* and moſt *imperfect*: Thoſe who are placed among the *firſt* and moſt *exalted*, in the ſcale of intelligent ſpirits, approach *neareſt* to the undiſturbed and conſummate felicity of GOD himſelf.

'PAIN, therefore, is not neceſſary in order to the ſupreme happineſs of created natures; but only to *ſupply* deficiencies, to *aſſiſt* 'indigent powers (where a ſufficient fund in nature would be, 'otherwiſe, wanting to aſſiſt) and ſtir them up to *aſpire*, more 'ſtrongly, after their *true felicity*, their *full perfection* of *good*.' And this conſtitution is wholly ordered with a *moral* view, that happineſs may be the *purſuit*, the *choice*, and *acquiſition* of man, and, conſequently, be the more exalted and exquiſite; as it is, in

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a manner, his own *production*, his *honour*, and the reward of his *perſonal merit*.

BY an undeniable parity of reaſon, 'an experience of *good* could 'not be neceſſary to the utmoſt aggravation of *miſery*;' becauſe as GOD is ſupremely happy, becauſe incapable, neceſſarily incapable, of the leaſt diſtreſs; thoſe muſt be '*ſupremely miſerable*, who are 'rendered by their ſituation, and unalterable circumſtances, in-'capable of the leaſt *gleam* of comfort, the leaſt *intermixture* of 'ſelf-enjoyment.' And though *moral purpoſes* may be ſerved, by appointing, in *lower* ſcenes of intelligence, evil to be the *forerunner* and *harbinger* of good; yet nothing of this kind can be pretended (nor, as it now appears, can any *natural* reaſon be aſſigned) in the caſe of allotting ſcanty and tranſient pleaſure, as the *preparation* for more extenſive and univerſal evil. The ſuppoſition, therefore, is not only unworthy the amiable character of the true DEITY; but abſurd even upon the ſuppoſition of a falſe god, intending, upon the whole, the utmoſt hurt and miſchief to the creation.

As additional evidences of the abſolute *goodneſs* of the DEITY, let me ſubjoin—that the univerſal order of nature, when not obſtructed, but allowed to fulfil its appointed and regular courſe, *tends* to *good*; that no one branch of the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem of things can be fixed upon, which had *originally* an *evil* direction, or which, if not marred and perverted, can poſſibly *terminate* in evil; that thoſe in the human ſpecies, and in every ſuppoſeable order of intelligent ſpirits, who are kind, and condeſcending, and generous in their diſpoſitions, are *alone happy*; and that *benevolence* is the *ſpring* of their moſt refined and exalted felicity—Which, it is as much a contradiction to ſuppoſe, to be any other than the

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conſtitution of a *good* being, as to imagine a frame, in which order directly reſulted from confuſion, and evil, abſolute final evil, naturally and unavoidably from good. And, particularly, the *exuberance* of good upon the whole in the *viſible* creation (from whence we may fairly draw the ſame inference, as to worlds *unknown* and *inviſible*) is the cleareſt and moſt lively proof, that *benevolence* and *mercy* are *eſſential* principles, and the *chief* and moſt *prevailing* principles, in the nature of that glorious being, from whom this exuberance of good flows.

MANKIND, in all ages of the world, have been very high and ſtrong in their preſumptions, but weak in reaſon. And this, which is indeed the natural ſource of univerſal error in all its various inconſiſtencies, has actually produced both the implicit *believer*, and the incredulous *caviller*: the one frequently aſſenting to he knows not *what*; and the other as often objecting, he knows not *why*. Fancy, paſſion, and certain external ſtriking appearances of things, are equally their rule of judgment. And this, in the infidel, appears in nothing more clearly, than in his objections againſt the *goodneſs* of GOD, which may all be reduced to this one, the *appointment*, or *ſufferance*, of *evil*. For imperfection of knowledge, and imperfection of happineſs, are *comparative* evils, and as truly included under this general head, as more *direct* and *poſitive* miſery.

EVIL has been commonly divided into two kinds, *moral*, and *natural*. And the *firſt* of theſe, in particular, is urged as a moſt formidable objection againſt the ſupreme *wiſdom* and *goodneſs*, and, indeed, againſt the very being of a GOD; and how to give a clear and ſatisfactory account of its *true original*, did, for many ages, confound the reaſon of mankind, unaſſiſted and unenlightened by revelation. But *chriſtianity* has preſented us with, I think, an eaſy

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ſolution of this difficulty with reſpect to the *human race* (and the ſame may be applied, in ſome meaſure, to all other *intelligent beings*) by declaring, that they are rational and *free* creatures; and that all moral evil ſprings, entirely, from their own corrupt *choice*, and *voluntary perverſion* of their implanted faculties.

Now that this is the *true* account, or, in other words, that all thoſe wrong determinations and purſuits, which conſtitute *moral evil*, were not *originally* inherent in it, but are owing to a willful *ſelf-corruption*, will undeniably appear (if we ſet aſide the arguments from the perfections of GOD) from taking a ſhort view of *human nature* itſelf. For what is the true idea of it? Is it not this?—'Reaſon at the helm, conducting and governing the infe-'rior principles?' And, therefore, when the paſſions prevail againſt reaſon, muſt there not be a *perverted* and *unnatural* ſtate? Shall we form our idea of human nature from the *brutal* part of it, or from the more noble and excellent, the *intellectual*?—*Nature* is a general term, to denote thoſe *laws* by which the Creator governs the univerſe, and the *eſtabliſhed order* of things. Now this *order*, with reſpect to mankind, is, 'that the *underſtanding*, and *reflection*, 'ſhould preſide over appetite and inſtinct, and regulate all their 'impulſes.' So that whatever, in their temper or conduct, is contrary to the dictates of the rational and moral principle, whatever is evil and vicious, muſt of neceſſity be, at all times, *irregular*, and a contradiction to *human nature* upon *the whole*.

I ONLY deſire, it may be obſerved further, that I am not obliged, in this part of my diſcourſe, to appear as an advocate for *human liberty*, becauſe all *moral evil* neceſſarily ſuppoſes it; and, upon any other ſcheme, is no more than a *weakneſs* and *imperfection* of nature, that has nothing *criminal* in it: the account before given

muſt, therefore, be the only juſt account, if there be indeed any ſuch thing as *moral* evil, or any other beſides *natural* evil in the univerſe. And the following brief remarks will help us to ſee in part, how the providence of GOD may be vindicated, with reſpect to ſuch corrupt and degenerate circumſtances of mankind.

IN general, the *poſſibility* of moral evil neceſſarily follows, from ſuppoſing *free agents* to exiſt, and that they are left to the uncontrouled *exerciſe* of their natural powers. And ſince the latter is no more, than ſuffering creatures to act agreeably to their frame, and the deſign of their formation; the whole inquiry is reduced within a narrow compaſs, and terminates in this ſingle point—'Whether 'it be conſiſtent with the perfections of GOD, *to create free agents.*' But now to which of the *divine* attributes, can it be imagined, that the making beings, endued with a power of *choice* and *ſelf-direction*, is repugnant? Not ſurely to *juſtice*, becauſe ſuch a being may be eaſily conceived to be vaſtly preferable to abſolute non-exiſtence; nay, it may, in many circumſtances, be a very *deſirable* and *eligible* ſtate. And, conſequently, it is ſo far from being in *general* inconſiſtent with the notion, that the great Author and Governor of the univerſe is a *juſt*, or even a *benevolent* being, that it may, *itſelf*, be a convincing and undeniable demonſtration of it.

IF it be urged, that allowing it may prove goodneſs in general, it is not, however, the wiſeſt way of diſpenſing the *greateſt good* upon the *whole*: I anſwer, how is it *poſſible*, that we ſhould know this? Are we capable of comprehending the vaſt ſchemes of an infinite mind? or can we judge diſtinctly of all the *uſes*, that may be anſwered in the univerſe, by creating free agents of *different* powers and capacities for happineſs? Objections of this ſort, which are in truth not levelled againſt the *goodneſs* of GOD, but againſt his *wiſdom*,

wiſdom, in taking the moſt proper methods to confer the greateſt good, are attempts to argue where we have no principles to proceed upon; and muſt, therefore, be extremely raſh and preſumptuous. So that this ſhort view of the caſe is ſufficient to prove, that the general notion of *free agency*, and, in conſequence, of the *poſſibility* of *moral evil*, is neither a reaſonable objection, againſt the *exiſtence* of a Firſt Cauſe of all things abſolutely perfect; nor, againſt the belief of a *wiſe* and *gracious* providence—And, further, that an *indeterminable variety* (ſince it has been above ſhewn, that there *may be* a *variety*, and the abſolute goodneſs of GOD does not, and cannot, oblige him to make all intelligent beings *equal*, endued with the higheſt degrees of *reaſon*, *liberty*, and *moral perfection*) I ſay an *indeterminable variety*, with reſpect to the capacities and circumſtances of mankind, can never be ſhewn *not to be the fitteſt* and *beſt upon the whole:* ſince we have neither knowledge nor experience enough, on which to ground even a *plauſible preſumption*, and much leſs a *probable proof*, that infinite wiſdom, even in purſuance of the main end of creation and providence, the *univerſal good*, is not moſt eminently diſplayed in the *greateſt diverſity* of reaſonable and free agents.

As therefore we can have no ſure foundation, on which to conclude, that the *loweſt* degrees of intelligence and liberty are inconſiſtent with the ſupreme wiſdom of the DEITY, if we only conſider the reaſonable univerſe as one *whole*, one *great connected ſyſtem*, compounded of various parts; nothing further remains, under this firſt head of moral evil, but to ſhew, that what we have ſuppoſed to be *wiſe* and *fit*, in the *general*, is doing no real *wrong* or *injury* to *particulars*: or, in other words, that thoſe rational creatures, who belong to the *loweſt claſs* of free agents, can have no cauſe to complain of being *arbitrarily* and *hardly* treated.

AND if we will admit this unqueſtionable principle of equity, 'that *nothing* can be expected from the various orders of intelligent 'beings, but what is *proportioned* to their ſeveral powers, and that '*thus much* will be required of *all*,' the point is clear beyond all juſt exception. For if, where there are unequal *powers*, unequal *degrees* of *good* be required; and if the *leſſer* degrees of *power* be as capable of producing the *leſſer* degrees of *good*, as *ſuperior powers* are of producing the *greater* degrees of *good*; all caſes of this kind, that ever have, or can, happen, are, in reſpect of *juſt* and *fair* treatment, brought to an exact *equality:* and the particular difficulties, which mankind at preſent labour under, are clearly and ſufficiently accounted for. For *man* is as *able* to yield that ſervice which is required of him, and exactly proportioned to his ſtrength, as *higher intelligences* are, to perform their larger and more extenſive duty. This, I ſay, with what went before, fully vindicates the conduct of providence, ſo far as the controverſy about *moral evil* is concerned. But if reaſon, by any unavoidable misfortune, be ſo weakened and impaired, that men are not *morally intelligent* and *free*; this, as in the caſe of *idiots*, and all the actions that proceed from it, however wild and injurious, can only be denominated *natural evils.*

WHICH SECOND claſs may be reduced, either to thoſe which are common to *all*, as well as abſolutely neceſſary from the frame and conſtitution of the *univerſe*; or to *penal evils*; or, elſe, to ſuch as are occaſioned by beings that *act freely*, and are the *voluntary* inſtruments of evil to one another.

AND of the *latter* ſort, the ſame thing may be ſaid, that has been already ſuggeſted in diſcourſing of *moral* evil, *viz.* that the *poſſibi-*

poſſibility of them certainly follows, on ſuppoſing *free agents* to exiſt—that the *permiſſion* of them, as in the *other* caſe, and for the ſame reaſon, if GOD can, as has been ſhewn, *wiſely* form free agents, muſt be entirely reconcileable with the moſt honourable idea we can entertain of him; ſince it is, in fact, nothing more, than the leaving them to the *uſe* of their faculties—and, further, that all the irregularities and miſchiefs, which are thus occaſioned by the *abuſe* of natural liberty, may be completely *rectified* in another ſtate, and unſpeakably to the advantage of the *innocent ſufferer*.

AGAIN, with reſpect to *penal evils*, it ſhould be obſerved—that they are abſolutely neceſſary to check the *growth* of *vice*, and, by that means, to ſecure the *rectitude*, and ſupreme *happineſs*, of the moral creation. For if reaſonable beings were ſuffered to go on in thoſe irregular courſes with *impunity*, which are unbecoming the dignity of their natures; the probable conſequence would be, bringing the eternal rules of virtue and righteouſneſs into *contempt*, and introducing extreme *diſorder* and *miſery* into the world. It muſt be a vaſtly *leſs evil*, if it be *at all an evil* upon the whole, to take ſuch ſeemingly harſh and ſevere methods, to the great *pain*, or even to the *entire deſtruction*, of particular perſons, than to ſuffer wickedneſs to triumph, and give corrupt and miſchievous affections an unlimited ſcope, to the *deformation* and *ruin* of the whole intellectual ſyſtem. So that *penal evils*, denoting not only the *poſitive puniſhments* which GOD may inflict on ſinners, but all thoſe other *miſeries*, which either in *this life*, or *hereafter*, are the *natural effects* of vicious paſſions unreformed; *penal evils*, I ſay, which, in this extenſive view, comprehend a very conſiderable part of the whole ſum of *natural evils*, appear, for the reaſons above-mentioned, to be not only *conſiſtent* with the *wiſdom* and

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goodneſs of the ſupreme governor of mankind, but to be indeed *neceſſary*, in the government of an abſolutely perfect being.

I NOW proceed to make ſome obſervations, which are not ſo confined, but may be applied to all appearances of *natural evil* without exception; and are, therefore, *a general vindication* of the ſovereign goodneſs of providence, in the ſettled train and order of things.

AND, in the FIRST place, let it be obſerved, that nothing is *properly* an *evil*, which it is inconſiſtent with the perfections of GOD to *permit*, or *appoint*, but what deſerves that character *upon the whole*. And this we cannot pretend to ſay of any thing we are acquainted with, nor indeed of any *natural evils* which are of a *limited* duration. It is very poſſible, that they may have a tendency to promote the more ſolid and durable happineſs of *individuals* (after ſeveral *intermediate* conſequences, which we are too ſhort-ſighted to trace) as well as the *general good* of the creation. Nor can we demonſtrate, or even argue the contrary with any probability, unleſs we can, likewiſe, comprehend all the *infinite variety* of deſigns, that an all-wiſe being may intend to ſerve by *particular occurrences*, and thoroughly underſtand the *whole plan* of his government, the *connection* of the ſeveral parts of it, and their *reference* and *ſubordination* to each other. It muſt, at leaſt, be paſt diſpute, that what ſeems *wrong*, in the preſent ſtate, may be *rectified* in ſome future ſcene of exiſtence; and the *pain*, now felt, be vaſtly over-balanced by the ſucceeding *pleaſure*. And thus the *wiſdom* and *goodneſs* of GOD, notwithſtanding ſome dark and gloomy appearances, will in the conſummation of his ſchemes, be eminently diſplayed in the frame of the world.

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FOR nothing can rationally be eſteemed *ſuch an evil*, as is an argument either of *injuſtice*, or *cruelty*, in the perſon who appoints it, which has a natural tendency to *produce*, or by the ſame appointment will be *followed*, by a more extenſive and laſting *good*. And this we may fairly preſume, from the proofs already given of the neceſſary goodneſs of the Creator, will at laſt be found to hold true, with reſpect to all the *unavoidable evils*, that any part of the creation ſuffers.

LET me remark, in the SECOND place, that it is very unfair to argue againſt the *goodneſs* of GOD, from the miſeries that *actually* infeſt human life. For the queſtion is *not*, whether *men have made* the ſtate of the world worſe than *non-exiſtence*—but how GOD *made* it, and how he *intended* it ſhould *be governed*. For the *far greater* part of the evils of life, which are introduced by ourſelves, againſt the manifeſt *ſcheme* and *deſign* of the Creator, *he* is not at all *anſwerable*; but they muſt be wholly charged on the *voluntary abuſe* of our faculties, and the *unnatural exceſſes* of our paſſions.

AND from hence it follows, that the only ſure way to form a right judgment in this caſe is, to conſider what the ſtate of the world *would be*, if *all* its rational inhabitants conſtantly followed the order of *nature*, and the rules preſcribed by the *author* of it. This will diſcover to us GOD's *creation* anſwering the plan of it in his infinite mind: Every other is a *falſe view*, that can give us no idea of his *real character*; becauſe it only ſhews us the *corruption* and *diſorder* of his works.

As therefore it is a certain truth, confirmed by the experience of all ages, that if men were univerſally *cautious* and *prudent*, *diligent* and

and *induſtrious*—they would probably *ſucceed* in moſt of their *reaſonable* deſigns, and be crowned with *proſperity*; that if they were all *juſt* and *generous*, and acted on the ſtrict principles of *probity* and *honour*—*reſpect* and *friendſhip*, *peace* and *harmony*, would flouriſh among them, the moſt deſirable *advantages* of civil life would be ſecured, and the *miſchiefs* ariſing from treachery, oppreſſion, diſcord, and violence, would be in a great meaſure prevented; and that if they were all *temperate*—they muſt of neceſſity enjoy a vaſtly larger proportion of *health*, of *vivacity* and *ſtrength* of mind, of *reſolution* and inward *compoſure*; and as this appears, from their very frame, and the eſtabliſhed tendency of things, to be *the courſe of action*, which their creator intended they ſhould purſue: Our reaſon immediately leads to this concluſion, that the *original conſtitution*, in this lower world, was admirably calculated to promote our *happineſs*, and, if ſteddily adhered to, would render our *preſent ſituation*, upon the whole, very *convenient* and *comfortable*. And we ourſelves are, in innumerable inſtances, the unhappy inſtruments of *our own miſery*; turning many fruitful parts of the earth into *deſarts*; inventing various unnatural ſcenes of *terror* and *cruelty*; ſpreading *ſlavery* and *deſolation*, and a melancholy face of *diſtreſs* and *ruin*, over the moſt flouriſhing countries; invading each others moſt valuable *rights* and *liberties*; and, in a word, *perplexing* our own minds, while we *diſturb* and *torment* our fellow-creatures.

THESE are *none of them* to be reckoned as *the works of* GOD, which his hand hath wrought; but they are the dreadful monuments of *human* pride, avarice, and luſt of power, and other equally *unnatural* and *pernicious* vices. So that the objection raiſed, from the viſible appearances of *evil*, is built on a complication of *falſe facts*, which are theſe—That the *actual* condition of man is his *natural* condition—that if *miſery really* prevails, the frame of nature

nature could not have been *deſigned at firſt*, nor *wiſely adapted*, to promote *happineſs*—and that GOD is not only anſwerable for *his own* purpoſes and operations, but for the wilfull irregularities and diſorders of *his creatures*. I ſhall only add, that this objection, which has been ſhewn to involve ſo many abſurdities in it, is wholely founded on a groundleſs and improbable preſumption, *viz.* that the *preſent* is an *entire, independent, unconnected* ſcene, that has no *relation* to any *future* ſtate of being; a preſumption that does not at all ſuit with the *moral, active, and vaſtly improveable faculties* of the mind of man, nor, conſequently, with *true philoſophy*. It ſhould therefore be rejected, as equally *ignorant* and *illiterate* in the principles of human nature, and the ſcience of human life; as it is *repugnant* to the duties of piety, and *ſubverſive* of the grand fences of virtue.

I THINK I may venture to aſſert, in the THIRD place, that the *origin* of *evil*, as it ſtands in the preſent argument to be diſcuſſed, can in no other way be accounted for, than by ſuppoſing it to be either the *appointment*, or at leaſt the *permiſſion*, of a *good* being. This perhaps may wear the face of a paradox, or a very abſurd and extravagant poſition: and it may be aſked by ſome—What! can *evil* only *derive itſelf* from *good?* Is *benevolence* the direct and proper *ſource* of it? And ſhall we, upon the ſame principles of reaſoning, aſcribe *happineſs* to *malice*, as the *natural fountain* from whence it ſprings, and ought to be expected? Shall we thus confound reaſon and nature, cauſes and effects, and all imaginable differences of things?

I ANSWER, that we may, indeed, run into this abſolute confuſion of right and wrong, for want of underſtanding, or, which is in its conſequences the ſame, from not attending to, the true ſtate

of the argument: but when my meaning is explained, there will, I apprehend, be no danger, and ſcarce a poſſibility, of ſuch confuſed ideas—I do not aſſert, that *real* and *abſolute evil* may be aſcribed to goodneſs, as its proper cauſe, but only *ſeeming*, *mitigated*, evil; the evils *complained of* in human life, the evils *objected to* by diſcontent, or *atheiſm*; conſidered in their *original appointment*, their *end*, their *uſes*, their manifeſt *tendency* to a viſible and extenſive *good*. And of theſe I will again affirm, and undertake undeniably to prove, that they could never take place, but under the government and order of *ſupreme benevolence*.

A *malevolent* principle could not be the cauſe of them, becauſe *theſe* are evils with a preponderance of good.—A *capricious* being, alternately actuated by *good* and *evil* diſpoſitions, cannot be the cauſe of this evil, becauſe it has been one *unvaried* operation, in all ages: which is the mark of uniform and ſteddy deſign; whereas wanton humour is blind and roving, and liable to infinite unaccountable ſtarts, and diverſities. And, for the ſame reaſon, it cannot poſſibly be aſcribed to *chance*, which is equally incapable of obſerving regular proportions, equally inconſiſtent and indeterminate, and ever varying from itſelf. *Fate* on the other hand, being rigid and inflexible, muſt maintain as to *individuals*, as well as upon *the whole*, the ſame preciſe *actual* ſcene of happineſs, or extreme of miſery; contrary to univerſal experience. There, therefore, only now remains the *Manichean* doctrine of *two principles*, to account for the origin and riſe of evil. And *this* can by neither party be admitted, becauſe both deny, that the exact proportions of good and evil, in the univerſe, are *equal*: which could be the *only ground* of an *united* operation, between two beings of equal wiſdom and power, but of directly contrary diſpoſitions. And if all theſe ſchemes fail, as, I perſuade myſelf, they muſt appear to

be moſt egregiouſly abſurd; if neither *two* oppoſite and independent *powers*, if neither *fate* nor *chance*, if neither a *malevolent*, nor a *capricious*, DEITY could be the *cauſe* of the *univerſe*, as it *now* exiſts: there being *no other poſſible cauſe*, in nature, to be aſſigned, its origin muſt be imputed to a being of *abſolute benevolence*, deſtitute of the leaſt mixture of any contrarious and oppoſing principle. This ſeems, to me, to carry with it a force almoſt irreſiſtible.

LET us now proceed one ſtep further, and ſee, whether, from the *character* of *evil itſelf*, there are not plain indications of the benevolence and graciouſneſs of the firſt cauſe. *Evil* follows from *theſe laws* of nature, which are moſt *uſeful*, and moſt *neceſſary*: and thus far, of itſelf, it plainly ſhews us, that it was not deſigned as *miſchief* upon *the whole*; but that it is only an *accidental conſequence* of a conſtitution, wiſely framed for the *greater* general good. *Evils* are, again, in innumerable inſtances, *medicinal*; ſuch as 'remorſe of conſcience, and the natural calamitous effects of 'vice;' and, conſequently, they repreſent to us the *friend* and *phyſician*, and not the determined *foe*, of mankind, and the *corrupter* of their happineſs—They are frequently the *means* of happineſs, by human nature not otherwiſe attainable, or, at leaſt, of exalting the taſte and reliſh of its pleaſures. Even the moſt ingenuous, laudable, and godlike affections of human nature muſt always ſuppoſe a *poſſibility* of *pain* and *ſuffering*, when they are oppoſed and controuled; and however adapted to ſerve the nobleſt purpoſes, by being *falſe* and *miſplaced* affections, they may multiply the *cauſes* of our *miſery*. *Reſentment*, the natural repeller of injuries, and provider for immediate ſelf-defence, may be aggravated into *revenge* and *malice*: *emulation*, the chief ſpur to great purſuits, may ſwell into exorbitant and deſtructive *ambition*: but the *ſource* was origi-

nally *good*, and the luxuriant excreſcencies could only ſpring from a *generous root*.

AND let us examine any other inſtances, and we ſhall find, that the intention and view of the GOD of nature was *kind* and *gracious* in them *all*. There is not a ſingle *exception* that can be named; not one caſe, which can be ſhewn to have a different *direction*; not one, even the moſt minute, circumſtance of *unneceſſary evil*; no one ſeeming evil however trivial, and thought below the *ſceptic*'s notice, but what was deſigned in the end to *terminate* in *good*.

BUT I am aware, that it will be objected to what has been already offered: that, indeed, the *evils* which we now behold, or ourſelves endure, may be a means of procuring for us a greater *good*, and exceedingly overbalanced by ſucceeding *pleaſures* in a future life; that many *natural evils* may be uſeful, and even neceſſary, in the *preſent ſtate*, and while mankind continue to be as they are, partly *intelligent*, and partly *animal*; and that, upon the ſuppoſition of *moral* evil, *penal* is fit and reaſonable. But all this, though it be true, will not reach the main difficulty.

'FOR what *need* was there, that ſuch an *imperfect* ſyſtem of creatures ſhould be brought into being? What *need* of *mere animals*, with ſtrong ungoverned inſtincts, frequently tormenting to *themſelves*, and injurious, nay deſtructive, to others; even to *rational beings* of a ſuperior order; who in their turn tyrannize over, oppreſs, and are neceſſitated to deſtroy, the *brute* creatures? What *need* of ſuch a *diminutive* race of *intelligent agents* as men are, impriſoned in bodies, that are a conſtant check to the vigorous operations of *reaſon*, and expoſe them to numberleſs *wants*

and *miſeries*; creatures of ſuch limited moral powers, ſuch ſtrong paſſions, prejudices, and contrary inclinations; who, by their *vices*, may bring the evil of *puniſhment* on themſelves, and be the occaſions of *infinite calamities* to each other? Could not the all-wiſe, and almighty, author of the univerſe have made all his intelligent creatures ſo *perfect*, as that it ſhould be utterly *improbable*, that they would debaſe and corrupt their own natures, or make their own exiſtence, or that of their fellow-creatures, in any degree *miſerable?* Might not the inanimate material world have been ſo framed, or at leaſt ſo governed, as not to cauſe *neceſſary* and *unavoidable* evil to any of its rational inhabitants? And though the preſent ſcene of things ſhould be allowed to be *conſiſtent* with the *general notion of goodneſs*; would it not have been more worthy *ſupreme* and *infinite* goodneſs, to have communicated to *all beings* the higheſt meaſures of happineſs: or, at leaſt, never to have ſuffered ſuch moving objects of *diſtreſs*, as common humanity teaches us to *prevent*, or, if that be beyond our power, always ſtrongly inclines us to *relieve?*' Theſe queries, in which the whole force of the objections, relating both to *moral* and *natural* evil, is collected, may ſeem very ſpecious and plauſible: but, I hope, they will be thought of no great moment, when the following things are conſidered.

FIRST, That the poſſibility of *natural evil*, in *ſome degree*, neceſſarily reſults from ſuppoſing any *finite* beings at all to exiſt, though of the moſt excellent ſuperior order. For even ſuch exalted creatures as theſe, through *imperfect* or *falſe* views, to which every *finite* underſtanding is liable, may be *perplexed* and *uneaſy* themſelves, and the occaſions of *trouble* and *pain* to others. So that the communicating a being, from whence there is a *poſſibility* that *evil* ſhould ariſe, is not, in the *general* conſideration of it, inconſiſtent

ſiſtent with the univerſal goodneſs of the DEITY: if it be, there muſt be *no creation* at all. However, it will ſtill be ſaid, that there ſhould be as *little evil* and *imperfection* as can be. And therefore I add,

IN the SECOND place, that it has been already ſhewn, in the former part of this diſcourſe, that GOD is not obliged to create *no* beings, but ſuch as are of the *higheſt order poſſible*, and endued with the higheſt degrees of *underſtanding* and *moral excellence*; but that, without any blemiſh to his character, there *may be*, for any thing we can prove to the contrary, *an infinite variety*; not only creatures of the loweſt *rank* of *intelligents*, but mere *animals* of vaſtly *different claſſes* in the ſenſitive life; and, conſequently, exactly *ſuch an univerſe* as really exiſts. Nay, it is, I think, almoſt demonſtrable, that a conſtitution *ſo diverſified may* yield, *upon the whole*, the *greateſt good*; and be, therefore, moſt worthy a being ſupremely benevolent.

FOR it is *poſſible*, that there *may now be as many* of the *higheſt* order of intelligences, as there *would have been*, if only that *ſingle order* had been created. The number could not *then* have been, ſtrictly ſpeaking, *infinite*; ſince there can be *no point* of duration, in which the DEITY, if not diveſted of his infinite wiſdom and power, *cannot create other beings*, poſſeſſed of the ſame capacities and excellencies. Or if the number could be *infinite*, what I have aſſerted will ſtill hold true, *viz.* that it is *poſſible*, that there *may now be as many* of the *higheſt* order of intelligences, as there *would have been*, if only that *ſingle order* had been created. And ſhould this which *may be*, *actually be*, the caſe with reſpect to the *higheſt* order; all the *other claſſes* of rational beings (in which we may fairly preſume, upon the whole and taken together, that there is a much

much greater proportion of *happineſs* than *miſery*) will be an *addition* to the ſum total of *good*. Nay, if we ſuppoſe (which is ſurely a *poſſible* caſe likewiſe) that there are not only in the *higheſt*, but in *every other*, rank of beings, riſing in a regular gradation one above another, as *many* creatures as there would have been, if *each* of theſe orders had exiſted *alone*, the leaving out any ſpecies of *mere animals*, whoſe *pleaſures* exceed their *pains*, muſt ſubſtract *juſt* ſo much from the *univerſal happineſs*.

IF there was really but *one*, and that the *higheſt*, order of beings only in the univerſe, this would leave ſuch a prodigious *chaſm* in nature, as *reaſon* muſt be aſtoniſhed at, and could never juſtly account for: nay *benevolence itſelf*, as well as reaſon, muſt be ſhocked, and ſtart at the thought of it. Or if the chain of being was maintained, in every link, quite down to the race of *man*, why ſhould *he* be excluded?—Is his *nature* incapable of happineſs, or unfit for the enjoyment of it? Was there not happineſs originally *deſigned* for it, adapted to its powers? Are not its *capacities* of pleaſure, of refined moral pleaſure, very *large* and *extenſive?* And will not the father of human ſpirits allow their faculties, to take *all poſſible ſcope* this way, without chaining them down to uſeleſs and arbitrary miſery? Why then, I aſk again, ſhould *man*, in particular, be omitted in *the ſcale* of *being?*

I SHALL only add, that the detracters from GOD's ſovereign *goodneſs*, upon account of the *evils* of human life, for the moſt part miſrepreſented and monſtrouſly aggravated, are not themſelves agreed, in particular inſtances, *what are evils:* one commending, or at leaſt ſlightly taxing, what another moſt ſeverely and bitterly exclaims againſt. The obſcure and more illuſtrious, the laborious and indolent, the public and retired, the contemplative and active life,

life, have been *ſeverally* repreſented as *great misfortunes*, *burdens*, *nuiſances*; as a ſingular temper, or habit of mind, has in each the aſcendent. In theſe caſes, therefore, they cannot ſo properly be ſaid to *judge* of happineſs, or miſery, of good, or evil, as to take their notions of both upon *fancy*: and we may reaſonably preſume the ſame, in moſt other inſtances. So that, upon the whole, theſe perſons ought not to expect, that their *objections* ſhould be allowed much weight, 'till they diſcard imagination, and adhere to ſolid and uncorrupted reaſon as their guide: and the *number* of ſuch kind of oppoſers, of important and fundamental principles, ſhould beget no *prejudice* in favour of their infidelity.

THUS have I, as I hope, fully confuted ſeveral *weak* and *unjuſt concluſions*, that have been drawn from the idea of *ſupreme goodneſs*: but I think it proper to add, further, a particular inſtance or two of things, that may, or may not, be juſtly and fairly inferred from it.

AND we may, I think, *certainly* infer from the *perfect* and *neceſſary benevolence* of the firſt and ſupreme principle of being, 'that 'he deſires the happineſs of his *whole creation*, throughout all its 'numberleſs varieties, and, in the moſt eminent ſenſe, the happi-'neſs of that part of it, which is *moral* and *rational*.' For it is ſo far from being ſuppoſeable, that a being of pure and unbounded goodneſs can have produced creatures of the *loweſt* rank, and moſt deſpicable appearance, even in *ſenſitive* life, with a view to make them *miſerable*, that it is next to a demonſtration, that the chief deſign he had, in their particular frame and conſtitution, muſt be the communication of *good*: ſcanty indeed, if compared with other higher diſplays and manifeſtations of his munificence, but always liberal, in proportion to their reſpective capacities for enjoyment.

ment. Muſt he not then be always deſirous, that this great *end* of *univerſal being* ſhould be anſwered, and, conſequently, that *all* his creatures ſhould *actually* attain that happineſs, for which he originally intended, and ſo wiſely fitted, their ſeveral natures.

BUT, *above all*, muſt he be ſuppoſed to deſire the happineſs of the *intelligent* and *moral* world; becauſe they are his nobleſt, his excelling, workmanſhip, much more elaborately formed than all animal beings; and with a vaſtly ſuperior importance and dignity of nature. From whence it inevitably follows, 'that he has cre-'ated their natures in their kind, and ſo as to unite and connect 'the whole ſcale of being, *perfect*; and that he has *hitherto* pur-'ſued, and will *ever* continue to purſue, all the *wiſeſt* methods of 'operation which are neceſſary to complete their happineſs, agree-'ably to their implanted faculties, and conſiſtently with his own 'abſolute perfection. It is impoſſible, they ſhould ſuffer any *un-'merited* evil, through the wantonneſs of his abſolute and irrever-'ſible *decree:* It is impoſſible, that he ſhould throw *unſurmount-'able difficulties* in their way, or *ſnares* by which they cannot avoid 'being entangled; or ſet himſelf to *counteract* their reaſonable and 'virtuous endeavours, to advance their ſupreme perfection and fe-'licity.' So far the concluſion is entirely obvious, and natural.

BUT how much further will it go, without leading us into a maze, by means of overſtrained or falſe deductions? We have clearly marked out the limits of truth, which always lie, when rightly drawn, near the borders of error. And thus it moſt evidently is in the preſent caſe. For can it be preſumed, becauſe GOD is deſirous of a creature's happineſs, 'that he will *aſcertain* 'the *event*, and bring it about in a way *contrary* to its nature? 'When he had formed beings capable, by their own *fault*, of ren-

'dering themſelves *miſerable*, can it be the leaſt diſhonour to his 'infinite *goodneſs*, after they have choſen and acted ſo perverſely, 'to *leave* them *ſo?* No: till their *choice* is altered, and as long as 'ſupreme goodneſs thinks fit to continue their being, their *miſery* 'ought not to be altered.' It is againſt general reaſon, againſt the particular conſtitution of their own nature, and the equal diſtributions of juſtice.

AGAIN, though the goodneſs of GOD may reaſonably lead us to conclude, 'that he will *reward* all, who are truly virtuous, 'with ſome diſtinguiſhed and ſignal tokens of his favour; and, 'further, that he will be *merciful* to our invincible infirmities, and 'make *condeſcending* and *gracious allowances* for the imperfection 'and frailty of human nature, and that his *puniſhments* of ſuch, 'as have incurred guilt, will not be *arbitrary*, but directed by 'reaſon and juſtice;' and though we may be almoſt as ſure of all theſe deductions, as we are of the very attribute of *goodneſs*, from which they are naturally inferred—yet we cannot, from the ſame principle, fairly conclude, 'that the *puniſhments*, hereafter to be in-'flicted on obſtinate and incorrigible ſinners, will not be ſomething 'very *ſevere* and *terrible*; or that they will not be adjudged to 'ſuffer *various meaſures* of miſery, as they have *ſeverally* diſho-'noured GOD, and violated his eternal law of reaſon.'

FOR if it be conſiſtent with the ſupreme *goodneſs*, of the great Governor of the world, to puniſh for ſin *at all*, which has been already proved in general; the allotting *different degrees* of *puniſh-ment*, to *different degrees* of *vice*, ſeems neceſſarily to derive itſelf from the rules of *equity* and *proportion*. And no reaſonable man can imagine, that a being of *abſolute benevolence*, and all other moral perfections, will treat in exactly the *ſame* manner, and with

equal

equal ſeverity, perſons whoſe crimes differ, both in number, and aggravation: or that a timorous, reſerved, irreſolute offender, who is afraid of great tranſgreſſions, and a ſlave, perhaps, only to one darling and intoxicating paſſion, will be rendered as miſerable by the righteous and compaſſionate judge of mankind, as a cool, deliberate, and hardned ſinner, who has extinguiſhed his natural ſenſe of good and evil, glories in the ſhame of his nature, and gives the looſe reins to an abandoned and deſperate impiety. *Both* in the ſentence of equal juſtice, and even mercy preſiding, may deſerve *puniſhment*; but each *his own* diſtinct and appropriate puniſhment. Whatever is beyond *that* is both injuſtice, and cruelty.

I SHALL conclude this chapter with obſerving, that this attribute of the DEITY is the natural ſubject of moſt lively *praiſe*, ſpringing from a liberal and ingenuous diſpoſition. And the ſublimer the *nature*, as the marks of goodneſs will, of conſequence, appear more clear and reſplendent, the *praiſe* will alſo be more exalted and ardent. Accordingly, the moſt wiſe and knowing, and the beſt, part of mankind have always aſſociated themſelves with ſpirits of a higher order, in thankful adorations of the *infinite goodneſs* of the univerſal parent of being; and have ever conceived of him as, upon that account, infinitely *lovely* and *amiable*.

AGAIN, the character of GOD's *abſolute goodneſs* demands our *reverence*, as well as our love and praiſe: and, hence, that expreſſive and emphatical phraſe of holy ſcripture—to fear *the* LORD *and his* goodneſs. For we have one of the moſt engaging motives in the world, that of gratitude (than which none works more powerfully in generous ſpirits) to make us concerned to pleaſe, and cautious of offending him.

INGRATITUDE, towards a common benefactor, is a crime ſhocking to human nature. Let one of our own ſpecies, eminent for public uſefulneſs, be diſregarded and undervalued, and treated with ſcorn and ignominy: let an upright beneficent prince, the father of his people, and the protector and guardian of their liberties, have the hard fate to meet with undutiful and rebellious ſubjects: let a faithful friend, and kind benefactor, be repaid with ill-offices: and there is ſcarce any man, but will declare his *abhorrence* of ſuch baſe proceedings. Ingratitude, therefore, when committed againſt the father and benefactor of men, and of all rational beings, as it is a crime unſpeakably more aggravated, will naturally excite a proportionably *greater* horror, in every reflecting and conſiderate mind.

FINALLY, As *goodneſs* is the moſt illuſtrious of all *moral* excellencies, let us endeavour to recommend ourſelves to the complacential favour, and peculiar mercy, of GOD, by cultivating, to the utmoſt, this *divine quality*, in our own minds. Let us ſtrive to *tranſcend* the character of the *merely righteous*, and riſe *above* it, to that of the *good* man, *tender-hearted*, *ſympathiſing*, and *univerſally benevolent*; to the character of the *patriot*, the *true lover* of *his country*, the *friend* of *all mankind:* with a ſoul ſo enlarged and diffuſed, as to comprehend, within the ſcope of its *good wiſhes* at leaſt, *all beings capable of happineſs*. Such a ſpirit as this has the conſtant *ſeed*, of refreſhing *tranquility* and *joy*, within; and, by feeling that it is *raiſed* and *elevated*, is always prompted to *mount* ſtill higher; till it finds itſelf more cloſely, and for ever, united to the GOD of *love*, from whom all perfection and happineſs flow.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

Of the Power *and* Providence *of* GOD.

THE omnipotence of GOD, which is now the point to be explained and proved, is, in a ſtricter ſenſe than any other of the glorious perfections of his nature, moſt juſtly aſcribed to him, the ſource and cauſe of being; of the ſtupendous magnificence, harmonious uſes, and exquiſite beauty of the creation; and the immediate ſupport and prop of its vaſtly extended, and complicated, frame. An eternal *inactive* being, though poſſeſſed of perfect intelligence (if ſuch a contradiction to nature could be ſuppoſed to exiſt) muſt be exactly the ſame in every reſpect, beſides his own bare exiſtence, as if there was an immenſe void, utterly deſtitute of all being: as he had exiſted from eternity *alone*, he muſt have continued in the ſame ſtate of inſignificant and uſeleſs *ſolitude* for ever; without any *exertions* of wiſdom, or *diſplays* of moral character, or liberal and diffuſive *communications* of good. And if he might be imagined, in this ſituation, to have any real ſelf-enjoyment, it could, one would think, riſe but little higher than the ſtillneſs, and as it were dead repoſe, of an undiſturbed immutable indolence; without any of the ſublime inconceivable felicities of *active* DEITY, of a father, an almighty protector, a munificent and gracious ſovereign, the fountain of life, and of innumerable comforts, diſperſed among his creatures, children, and ſubjects.

OR let us make another ſuppoſition ſomewhat different from this, and that is, that GOD, the firſt and only ſource of derived and dependent being, had a principle of *activity*, as well as of *intelligence*,

telligence, eſſentially inherent in his nature, but of *circumſcribed* and *limited* force; the conſequence in this caſe muſt be a *defective* conſtitution, and *narrow* extent of being, as it was, in the other, an abſolute impoſſibility that *any effects* ſhould be produced. Let it be allowed, here again, that there is an *omniſcient* mind, clearly and infallibly diſcerning the higheſt poſſible fitneſs, and uſes, and wonders of ſkillful compoſition, in every ſyſtem of created things; and a *wiſdom* capable of deſigning, with eaſe, what is abſolutely beſt upon the whole, and to the utmoſt perfection of grandeur and regularity, and harmonious tendency to the univerſal good; yet, ſtill, if the *effecting power* be not equal to the *execution* of that plan, which a ſuperior wiſdom has *formed*, the univerſe moſt curiouſly and exactly finiſhed, to the heighth of the model of omniſcience, muſt exiſt for ever in *idea* only, and could have no *actual place* in nature.

BY all which we are unavoidably led to this concluſion, that the *omnipotence* of GOD is a principle of the higheſt importance in natural religion; and that, without it, all his other attributes would be reſtrained in their operations, and in a great meaſure deprived of their beneficial efficacy. For the innate and propenſe *goodneſs* that dictates, and the *wiſdom* that contrives, the beſt frame of things, are only *remote cauſes*; but *power* is the *direct ſpring* from whence it flows, and derives its character of being real and ſubſtantial good. The goodneſs diſpoſing, the wiſdom ordaining and regulating, and the power ultimately effecting, muſt indeed all *unite* their influence; and therefore, in what I have now offered, I would not be underſtood to intend the exalting the *omnipotence* of GOD, ſo as in the leaſt to detract from the honour, and humble praiſe and veneration, of his other attributes; but only to ſhew, that *this* is of equal neceſſity to be admitted, for the purpoſes of creation and univerſal providence,

providence, and, consequently, for the support of religion, with the unbounded extent of his *intelligence*, or the absolute perfection of his *wisdom* and *moral excellence*.

IF indeed *these three*, which are equally essential properties of the original cause and supreme governor of the universe, and fundamental principles of all natural piety, if, I say, these three were strictly weighed, and distinctly characterised, as to their intrinsic worth; they might perhaps, with the greatest appearance of truth and justice, be *thus described*—That *power* is the most awful attribute, *wisdom* the most venerable, and *goodness* the most estimable of all, and singly amiable. In power, absolutely considered, there is no right ground of *esteem*. In wisdom, as it denotes only curious contrivance, and adapting the best means to the best ends, without a *moral benevolent* principle actuating and directing the whole, there is no solid foundation, on which to raise a character that is truly *amiable*. But if wisdom be supposed to include in it a principle of *morality*, as well as the right application of speculative knowledge in outward practice; if the choice of the best *end* proceeds from an approved disposition and habit of *goodness*, a habit deliberately preferred, and with care established, and the choice of the most proper subservient *means* be not for ostentation of skill, but from an esteem of *right conduct*, and a fixed resolution to adhere invariably to it in all instances; it will then perfectly coincide, or be at least inseparably connected, with the *character* of *goodness*, and deserve the same *general* denomination. However, this is not always the case; the ideas, as they have been before explained, are in nature distinct, and in example frequently distinct. And it is, in this appropriate and single view of each, that I make *power* the *lowest* attribute of intelligent being, and *wisdom* a *secondary* quality, and subservient to goodness; as the *first* most naturally excites the impression.

preſſion of dread, the *next* veneration, and the *laſt* both reverence and love. The *amiable* character inſpires much more delight, and ſtronger degrees of confidence, than the merely venerable; and the *venerable*, we can contemplate with more calmneſs and ſedate compoſure of mind, than the great and majeſtic; which, being cloathed with pomp and ſolemnity, inſpires diſtance and fear. And this laſt is the abſolute notion of *abſtracted power*—Our LORD is *great*, becauſe of the greatneſs of his *might*; but he is *excellent* in his *loving-kindneſs*.

THERE is indeed no perfection of the DEITY, that mankind in general appear to have ſo ſtrongly remarked, and to have given ſuch conſtant attention to, as that of his *power*. The *Almighty* has therefore been his moſt common and diſtinguiſhed character, in all ages. And of this there muſt be ſome as univerſal a cauſe, either in the original nature, or acquired ſentiments, or moſt general paſſions of man. In his *nature* there is no ſeed implanted, from whence it could directly ſpring; becauſe there are other properties in GOD more delightful, more attractive of contemplation, and, in themſelves, more reaſonable and ingenuous motives to all religious duties. From man's *acquired notions* much, from his *paſſions* more, of this effect may ſpring. Mankind by education, by habitual train of thought, by aſcendent pride and vanity, are devoted to the idol of *power*, as the ſovereign pitch of glory and perfection. They ſee that all bow down, and offer the incenſe of adulation at leaſt, and a fawning ceremonious reſpect, before its ſhrine. Princes contend for it; nations court it: while *wiſdom* repines in ſilence, and *goodneſs* is deſpiſed. Mankind are all fond of being diſtinguiſhed, even in the meaneſt offices and occupations of life. If they have any inferiors, they ſeem to think it becoming their diminutive, and by others ſcarce perceptible, rank of preheminence,

minence, to make them feel the weight of their ſubjection. They are apt to be in temper arbitrary, and in practice high and rigorous. —'What then, in this perverted ſtate of things, can ſtrike, can 'command attention, like *power?* What can engage, and adapt 'itſelf ſo completely to, mens common depraved opinions, deluded 'fancies, and intoxicated paſſions, as *ſovereign*, *infinite*, *uncon-* 'troulable *power?* This they immediately convert into the moſt 'ſublime attribute of DEITY, the *ſole* rule and meaſure of his 'government, in which his whole *moral* character is abſolutely 'ſwallowed up and loſt.'

IT may be further obſerved, that the generality, being more eaſily led by animal impulſes than the refined dictates of reaſon, will of conſequence be ſwayed more by mercenary, than by ſublime and generous, motives. Servility and fear, therefore, will have a more forcible and univerſal influence, than gratitude and love, or the eſſential differences of things. 'And the object of *fear* the 'over-ruling paſſion, and of *ſervility* the predominant temper, be- 'ing *power*, bare *unregulated illimitable* power; this, of conſe- 'quence, muſt make the *deepeſt* impreſſion upon the mind, and 'become the *chief* object of adoration.'

BUT as theſe, which have been already aſſigned, are reaſons diſparaging and debaſing to human nature, I ſhall (to do it as much juſtice and honour, as notorious and undeniable fact will allow) produce another reaſon, why the *power* of the DEITY is generally admitted to have more demonſtrative proofs, and is of more common and extenſive energy, than his *other* attributes; and that is, 'that, upon a ſuperficial ſurvey of the works of nature, the *in-* 'ſcriptions and *marks* of power are the *ſooneſt traced*, and preſent 'themſelves, with undeniable evidence, to the *firſt notices* of *ſenſe*.' A man need but open his eyes, and look around him, to ſee moſt

majeſtic and wonderful ſignatures of *omnipotence* diſplayed: but it requires a meaſure of reflection to trace the footſteps of *wiſdom*, and *goodneſs* is not always deſcribed, in legible characters, upon the ſurface and outlines of nature. But, however, it muſt at leaſt be allowed, that the wiſdom and goodneſs of the Creator are *gradually* learned; and thoſe who inquire and ſearch the deepeſt, with humility and an honeſt temper of mind, will entertain the moſt worthy and enlarged ideas of *each* of theſe perfections. Whereas the ſcene of power is, in a manner, opened *all at once*; and the *firſt view* exhibits ſo much of it, as leaves but little room for ſurprize and aſtoniſhment, upon any future *new* diſquiſitions.

THE magnificent orbs of heaven, the ſun that ruleth by day, and the moon, with a borrowed and reflected ſplendor, by night; the earth, and ſeas, ſtocked with innumerable living inhabitants; the huge bulk of ſome parts of nature, the vaſt compaſs, the various and regular order, of the whole; the preſerving every ſpecies diſtinct, and marking the boundaries of each ſo preciſely, that where one claſs of being ends, another, without leaving a chaſm, inſtantly commences; and the maintaining theſe diſtinctions even in the extreme points, upon the whole, ſo invariably, that nature wears but very ſeldom even the face of diſorder, and heterogeneous compoſition; and the making every part conſpire, ſteddily, in a tendency to ſome degrees of good and common uſe: Theſe things, I ſay, with many others that might be readily enumerated, are ſenſible and moſt undoubted illuſtrations of the *great* and *unbounded extent* of the *divine power*.

IF we ſearch deeper into the more abſtruſe receſſes of nature, that lie remote from ſenſe and univerſal obſervation, we ſhall, indeed, find *different* ſubjects for wonder and praiſe: *an univerſe*, as

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it were, in *miniature*; numberleſs indeterminable *worlds* of animals, imperceptible to *ſenſe*, included in objects, that are themſelves *viſible*. And here without doubt, in the firſt heat of our aſtoniſhment at theſe *new* and *unexpected* diſcoveries, we ſhall be directly prompted to aſk our minds, and inward reflecting powers, this queſtion—Who hath *created* theſe things? 'What ſtupendous 'and incomprehenſible power has, thus, included worlds *within* 'worlds, and made ſome of the *minuteſt* parts of the univerſe an '*actuated* ſcene, a region of *inſtinctive* life? And the general and 'moſt reaſonable anſwer to this queſtion will be, that nothing can 'be ſo juſtly ſuppoſed to have formed this complex and curious 'fabric, in which wonders are *involved* in wonders, even to the '*center* of created things, as *abſolute omnipotence*.' From hence, therefore, it muſt be allowed, that we have a clear ground for a preſumption, at leaſt, of the unbounded power of GOD.

BUT though the inſtances of power are *multiplied* by ſuch philoſophical diſcoveries, are not the evidences *ſufficient*, and almoſt *equal*, which reſult from obſervations of *ſenſe*, and are equally flagrant to the more illiterate and unpoliſhed nations? The proofs deſigned, not to confirm the faith of the philoſopher, but adapted for the conviction of the human underſtanding in general? Undeniably they are: for, moſt ſurely, the ſmall and diminutive conſtitution of a *mite* cannot require the exertion of *greater power* to produce it, than that of the vaſt orbit of *the ſun*, which is of ſo much greater conſequence in the creation of GOD. And, therefore, though the illuſtrations of *wiſdom* may derive additional *force*, from the *variety* of the inſtances produced, the proofs of *power* are, in *all* examples of material being, much the *ſame*. Or if there be any *difference*, the viſible inſtances, and thoſe which are univerſally known, muſt, I think, be allowed to be the ſtrongeſt; becauſe

the *frame* of ſuch a vaſt luminous body, as the ſun, muſt require a more *wide* and *extended* operation, than the *conſtruction* of leſſer bodies; and of thoſe eſpecially, which are reduced within the moſt ſcanty dimenſions of ſpace. 'And as *intelligent* being tranſcends, 'in dignity of rank and nature, the merely *material* and *imperceptive*, a more *enlarged* and *perfect power* (if any diſtinction is at 'all to be made, with reſpect to the *communication* of *exiſtence*) 'muſt be neceſſary to the production of it.'

BUT ſtill it will be ſaid, that this is only arguing in general, and chiefly from preſumptions; and that reaſons ought to be produced more directly, and in a more regular form, for the *omnipotence* of GOD, as a neceſſary article, and one of the principal ſupports, of natural religion. I allow, that this may of right be demanded by the *atheiſt*; and deſired by the *believer* in GOD, for his firmer eſtabliſhment in this fundamental principle of religious truth. I ſhall, therefore, attempt a more particular and full explication of this important ſubject: only premiſing, that by the *power* of GOD I mean, not a mere *inſtinctive impulſe*, not an *undeſigning* and *mechanical force*, that produces its effects *neceſſarily*; but an *intelligent* and *voluntary activity*, entirely under the command of the agent, and exerted, limited, or reſtrained, by his free and wiſe determination. The evidences of ſuch a power, eſſential to the DEITY, I now proceed to offer in an orderly method, as the objection requires; and ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

THAT it muſt extend to *all things*, that can ever *actually exiſt*—That it reaches to *whatever is*, in abſtract rational idea or conception, *poſſible*—That the moſt glorious, ſupreme, DEITY muſt be able to *perform all his operations* with *eaſe*, and without the leaſt *labour* or *moleſtation*—And that he can execute and finiſh *all his works*

works at once, inſtantaneouſly, and without a gradual proceſs. Theſe heads comprehend the whole of the ſubject in its utmoſt ſcope: a few brief remarks will be ſufficient for each; and, after what has been already obſerved, and the inconteſtable, and almoſt univerſally admitted, evidences of the point in queſtion, a large diſcourſe upon it can ſcarce avoid being cenſured, as needleſsly prolix and trifling.

THE FIRST propoſition aſſerted is, that the *power* of the Firſt Cauſe and Supreme Governor of univerſal nature extends to *all things*, that *do*, or *ever can*, *actually exiſt*. And this is in a manner ſelf-evident: becauſe, his being the *higheſt* and moſt *abſolute* power in *real* nature, every thing that *he* is *unable* to produce muſt, in reality, be an *impoſſible* production; every thing that *he* is *unable* to regulate muſt be, for ever, *incapable* of any *actual* regulation. In him is included the *ſum* and *completion*, and *total poſſibility*, of *exiſting* power; it muſt, therefore, be the ſtrict meaſure of *every poſſible* method and order of creation, of *every poſſible* direction and chain of events, and form of government. And to ſuppoſe effects, where there is *no adequate* cauſe, is the very ſame abſurdity, as ſuppoſing effects *without a cauſe*; a moſt manifeſt contradiction to all the principles and dictates of human reaſon.

THE NEXT point aſſerted is, that the *divine power* reaches to *whatever is*, in abſtract rational idea or conception, *poſſible*. There is a plain difference between this, and the preceding, topic of inquiry; becauſe if the ſource of univerſal being was a principle of *limited activity*, many things might be *conceived*, that could never *actually be*. And the ſubjects of immenſe and moſt unlimited power are juſtly reduced to things, that are, in *their natures*, poſſible; becauſe every thing elſe is a mere chimera, that can never have

have any thing more than a romantic exiſtence, and is not capable of being raiſed even to that imaginary ſubſtantiality, but by a wild and diſtracted fancy.

WHO will pretend to aſſert, that *any power* can make twice two to be *three*, and not *four*, the ſun to be a *luminous*, and at the very ſame inſtant, in itſelf, an *opaque* and *dark* body; that any power can make a thing *to be*, and, at the very ſame individual moment of its being *ſomething*, to be *nothing*? Theſe are inconſiſtencies that deſtroy themſelves; and, therefore, no power can give them a *real being*, becauſe they are, in truth, nothing elſe but *eternal* and *immutable non-exiſtencies*. And as in every propoſition of this kind, it is equally *certain* that a thing *is not*, as that *it is*, if the *divine power* could extend itſelf to theſe, it muſt *annihilate*, at the very ſame inſtant that it *created* them.

BUT how does it appear, which is the direct point in view, that the *agency* of GOD reaches to *all things*, that are in rational idea *poſſible*?—Why thus: that no *greater act* of *power* can be conceived, by the human mind, than that of *creation*; that if we admit of the creation of *any material ſyſtem*, we can have no ſolid reaſon to heſitate, about *any poſſible conſtitution of matter*; that if we admit of *intelligent effects*, we can, upon no principles of reaſon, ſet *bounds* to the *order* and *degree* of derived intelligence; that admitting the *univerſal production* of beings to be poſſible, the *utter extinction* of being, by the ſame power, and the making *all* ſuppoſeable *changes* in the original ſyſtem (entirely under the *controul* of the firſt artificer) muſt be equally poſſible: and that *creation* in its wideſt extent, *annihilation*, and all the *changes* in created nature, comprehend the utmoſt of the *poſſibilities* of things.

I HAVE

I HAVE omitted to mention among the impoſſibilities, by which the power of GOD is defined, his not being able to *deſtroy his own being*, becauſe this is moſt evidently implied in his *neceſſary* and *immutable* exiſtence; and, therefore, ſcarce deſerved the notice of ſo many great and celebrated writers. And as to his power's not extending to actions *irrational*, or of *moral turpitude*, I ſhall at preſent paſs by this likewiſe altogether (though it be a general topic of argument, under the head of the *power* of GOD) becauſe the impoſſibility, here, entirely ſprings from its being a contradiction to his *moral attributes*, and not from any limitation of his *natural efficiency*; which is, at preſent, the only matter of our inquiry. To proceed, therefore, in the regular courſe of our argument, let it be conſidered,

THIRDLY, That the *Divine principle* of life and univerſal government muſt, of neceſſity, perform *all his operations* with *eaſe*, becauſe being pure intelligence, and perfect life, he can have no ſluggiſh or reluctant principles within him; having not a limited preſence, his activity of nature cannot be confined; being ſupreme in power, he can meet with no external impediments; but muſt be able, with equal eaſe, to ſuſpend or deſtroy all oppoſing derived powers, as he could at firſt communicate their exiſtence.

AND, FINALLY, That the DEITY can execute and finiſh *all his works at once*, without a ſlow and gradual proceſs, muſt likewiſe undeniably follow from his omnipreſence and eternal activity; becauſe, being by means of theſe perfections capable of operating, at the *ſame inſtant*, in *every part* of *ſpace*, no poſſible effect of his eſſential activity can be impeded, or reſtrained, but by *his own will*; and, therefore, ſhould he ever *will* to exert the whole extent of his

power

power (ſo far as it is capable of being comprehended in one ſingle act) the *effect* muſt immediately and neceſſarily follow. I have put in theſe words, *as far as it is capable of being comprehended in one act*; becauſe it is abſurd to ſuppoſe, that omnipotence ſhould ever be *exhauſted*, rendered *incapable* of creating new worlds (which may be multiplied to infinity) and reduced to a ſtate of abſolute *reſt* and *inaction*.

FROM treating of the *Divine omnipotence*, I naturally proceed to illuſtrate the doctrine of GOD's univerſal *providence*, and *government*: the ſubſtance of which is in general this—that as he *takes in* the *whole ſcheme* of things, with their minuteſt circumſtances, by the infinite penetration of his all-diſcerning mind; and as he *holds together* the *vaſt* and *complicated fabric* of the world (in which the diſorder of any part might impair the beauty and harmony of the whole, and create great confuſion) by his almighty power; ſo he *directs*, and *regulates*, all *events*, throughout the entire ſcope of created being—The ground of the argument for a *ſupporter*, *director*, and *governour*, is much the ſame, with that for a *creator* and *former* of the univerſe; *viz.* that any other ſcheme, beſides that of a conſtant and univerſal providence, muſt run us into the groſſeſt *abſurdities*.

FOR ſhall we, for inſtance, aſcribe the *continued order* of the world, and the *whole courſe* of events, to *fate*? What is *that*?—Is it a *real* principle, is it a proper *efficient* cauſe? So far from it, that, upon cloſe examination, we ſhall find it to be, in the preſent argument, juſt *nothing at all*, i. e. to be *no reaſon* of the *exiſtence* of any thing, nor capable of affording a ſolid and ſatisfactory *account* of the moſt *minute* and *trivial event* in nature.

FOR

FOR when it is ſaid that all things exiſt, and that the fabric of the world is upheld and maintained, by *fate*, this can have no other meaning 'than that the univerſe exiſts *neceſſarily*, and that it is abſolutely *impoſſible*, that we ourſelves, or any other the moſt inconſiderable part of it, ſhould *not have exiſted*; and that, not from conſiderations of *wiſdom*, and the *greater good* upon the whole, but from ſome principles *eſſential* to it, and inherent in its very nature.' But is it indeed a contradiction, *abſolutely* a contradiction, to aſſert, that this *earth*, for example, might *never* have exiſted; or that it might have been placed in a *different* part of *ſpace*; or that it may be entirely *annihilated?* Nay, is it a contradiction to ſuppoſe, that the meaneſt *inſect* might either *not* have been, or may *ceaſe* to be? What principle of reaſon is it, that this may be ſaid to contradict? We all know that there is none at all; and even the *fataliſt* himſelf muſt be convinced of this, if he would conſult and examine his own ideas.

AGAIN, if a thing exiſts *neceſſarily*, ſome *preciſe mode* of its exiſtence muſt be, alſo, *neceſſary*. If we aſſert the contrary, this is, in effect, the ſame with ſaying, 'that it is not neceſſary, that it ſhould exiſt in *any* way, and yet that it is neceſſary, it ſhould exiſt in *ſome* way:' or, if ſome particular *mode* of being be abſolutely *neceſſary*, as it muſt ſurely be, where the *exiſtence itſelf* is neceſſary, how ſhall we account for it—that moſt parts of the univerſe, which are expoſed to our obſervation, are in a continual *flux?* How ſhall we account for the innumerable *changes*, and *variations*, to which the conſtitution of nature is ſubject? This, then, ſeems to be a very blind and bewildered ſcheme.

LET us now try, whether it will be at all *mended*, with reſpect to the *continued order*, any more than with reſpect to the *firſt origin*, of things, by having recourſe to *chance*. And the anſwer muſt be—not in the leaſt. For if there be any *adequate cauſe* of the continued exiſtence, and order of the world, ſubſiſting, we are able, from hence, to give a certain and determinate *reaſon* of its continued exiſtence, and order; and, of conſequence, it cannot be upheld by *chance*, nor can the affairs and concerns of it be directed, and regulated, by *chance*. But, on the contrary, if all this be entirely *fortuitous*, it as undeniably follows, that the univerſe, in all ſucceſſive ages, has been nothing elſe, 'but a ſeries of effects without a *cauſe*, or without any *proportionate power*, exiſting in nature, to produce theſe effects.' It muſt be owing to *chance*, that ſuch an infinite number of different effects conſpire in their *deſign*, and *uſe*, and that, but rarely, any *irregular* and *monſtrous* productions appear in the univerſe; that we are entertained with the proſpect of general *beauty* and *harmony*; that a conſtant ſcene of wonders, of incomparable *art* and *ſkill*, is exhibited to our view; and, to ſum up all, that we ſee, in the whole ſyſtem of creation, nothing elſe but marks of moſt accurate and ſtupendous workmanſhip, and not the leaſt reſemblance of an *accidental* and *fortuitous* production. Whoever can ſo far impoſe upon his underſtanding, as to admit theſe abſurd concluſions, is, in my opinion, qualified for being an *infidel* in every thing. The juſt inference, therefore, to be drawn from the whole, is this, that ſince neither *fate*, nor *chance*, can *govern*, any more than they could *make*, the world, there muſt, of neceſſity, be an *intelligent* and *active* principle, who *ſupports* its frame, and is the *director* and *diſpoſer* of all events.

AND

AND as it may juſtly be ſuppoſed, that this intelligent and active principle can be no other, than the *firſt cauſe* of all things; ſo reaſon teaches us to believe, that the author of the univerſe muſt always be *inclined* to *take care of*, and *govern*, the creatures which he has made. For it is very abſurd to imagine, that, when he has formed a beautiful and orderly world, he ſhould leave it to *ſhift* for itſelf, and, for want of his wiſe and powerful *ſuperintendency*, to run into irregularity and confuſion.

I NEED only to add, that for the government, which I am now arguing for, the great DEITY muſt be compleatly *qualified*. For, as he is the author of nature, he muſt have a *perfect knowledge* of its powers, motions, and operations; and of all the affairs and concerns of the world. And, upon this account, what we call *accidental* effects, which frequently diſconcert the beſt-laid human ſchemes, can create no *diſorder* in the *plan* of his government, nor hinder the *execution* of any of his deſigns: becauſe, with reſpect to the *ſupreme mind* (which comprehends, at one view, the whole courſe of things, and perfectly underſtands the force and efficacy of all natural cauſes) nothing can be *fortuitous* and *caſual*; but what are, commonly ſtiled, *accidents* muſt be as entirely ſubject to his direction and controul, as *any other neceſſary effects* of neceſſary cauſes. —Again, as the DEITY is conſummate in *wiſdom*, he has alſo infinite *power*; and is, conſequently, *qualified* in this reſpect, likewiſe, to exerciſe an univerſal providence. He that gave *being* to the univerſe muſt be *able*, with equal eaſe, to *regulate* all the affairs of it: eſpecially if we conſider, that his power is *ſupreme* and *irreſiſtible*; becauſe all other powers are *derived* from it, *dependent* upon it, and infinitely *inferior* to it.—Finally, to his boundleſs *wiſdom*, and uncontroulable *power*, we may add, what has, alſo, been

before proved, *viz.* that he is poſſeſſed of all thoſe *moral perfections*, which are *neceſſary* to the right government of the world. He is a being of incorruptible *juſtice*, and unlimited *goodneſs*, and can, therefore, never do any thing that is *cruel* and *tyrannical*; but muſt make the *happineſs* of his creatures, upon the whole, the *general end* of his providential adminiſtration. So that as, on the one hand, the *government* of the world cannot be a taſk too *difficult* for infinite wiſdom and omnipotence to manage; ſo, on the other, we have the utmoſt reaſon to conclude, that nothing will be thought *beneath* his notice, that tends to illuſtrate the glory of his *moral excellencies*; and eſpecially the amiable glory of his *goodneſs*, which is the chief perfection even of a ſupremely intelligent, and infinite, nature.

THUS have I endeavoured, in as clear and comprehenſive a manner as I was able, to give a ſhort abſtract of the general reaſonings, on which we build our belief of a *providence*. If it be aſked farther, in what way, it may be moſt juſt for us to conceive, that this *providence* is *exerciſed*; or, in what ſenſe, all the *good* and *evil events*, that happen in the world, may be properly *aſcribed* to it? I anſwer—FIRST, That we plainly ſee, that a great deal of *natural good*, and *evil*, is the reſult of thoſe *eſtabliſhed laws*, by which the Creator governs the univerſe; and as he at firſt *fixed*, and ſtill *continues*, that ſcheme and conſtitution from whence they directly proceed, they may, without doubt, be conſidered as *parts* of his *government*. Men are apt, indeed, becauſe the grounds of theſe things appear, in *nature*, to overlook the *hand* of that great and almighty Being, who *ſteers* and *directs* the whole courſe of events. Whereas nature, ſtrictly ſpeaking, is nothing elſe but the *order* of *providence*, or the *ſtated general courſe* of the *divine operation*; and is, in all its various appearances, carried on, by the infinite *wiſdom* of

of the Supreme Being, in ſuch a *manner*, as will beſt *ſubſerve* the great ends of his government.

BUT beſides the events, whether good or evil, which immediately *ſpring* from *neceſſary* cauſes, many may, likewiſe, be *occaſioned* by beings that act *freely*, and are the *voluntary inſtruments* of good, or evil, to each other. And, accordingly, we find in fact, that many of the *pleaſures* and *advantages*, and alſo of the *inconveniencies* and *calamities*, that accrue both to particular perſons, and public ſocieties, are owing to the various capacities, paſſions, intereſts, or to the particular virtues, or vices, of *men*. And it may be aſked, *how far* it may rationally be ſuppoſed, that the *providence* of GOD is *concerned* in ſuch caſes? To this I anſwer, that the *leaſt* that can be allowed is, that nothing of this kind can happen without his *permiſſion*: for if he who is perfectly wiſe, and has all nature at his command, *diſapproves* of any of the deſigns of his creatures, he can, with the utmoſt eaſe, *hinder* the *execution* of them. And this *permiſſion* of events, by GOD, muſt not be conſidered as the *indolence* and *careleſſneſs* of one, who is *unconcerned* about the ſtate of the univerſe, and the courſe of its affairs; but in this light: *viz.* 'as his *ſuffering* things to go on in ſuch, or ſuch, 'a particular channel, becauſe it is, upon the whole, *wiſe* and *fit*, 'and agrees with the *general ſcheme* of his government.' So that even *theſe* events may juſtly be *attributed* to his *providence*—not only becauſe this is *one law*, by which he *governs* the world, that *free agents* ſhould, at leaſt in all common caſes, be left to the *full exerciſe* of their natural liberty; but, alſo, becauſe he *permits* them, and *directs* them to a *good end*, and they are abſolutely *ſubject* to his *power* and *controul*.

BUT

BUT is this *all*, it may ſtill be ſaid, that is, or ought to be, included in our idea of a *providence*? Is it the utmoſt *compaſs*, and *extent*, of its operation—thus to maintain, and carry on, the ſame general courſe, the ſame unvaried train and order of events? Was the conſtitution of nature formed ſo *perfect*, at *firſt*, as to ſtand in need of *no ſucceſſive regulation*? Was it endued with *intrinſic powers* to *produce all* the effects, which the creator ever *intended* it ſhould produce? Or, rather, may it not be juſtly ſuppoſed, that the Supreme Being, upon *ſpecial* occaſions, *directs* and *over-rules* the *courſe* of events, both in the *natural* and *moral* world, by an *immediate influence*, to anſwer the great deſigns of his univerſal government? This laſt, I own, appears to me highly proper to be admitted for the following reaſons.

FIRST, That *no* ſuppoſition is, in general, ſo *honourable* to the perfect wiſdom and rectitude of the DEITY, as *this*—that upon all occaſions, which require it, he *regulates*, and *guides*, the *courſe* of *nature* in ſuch a manner, as to make it *ſubſervient* to the moſt *beneficial* purpoſes.

NOR, SECONDLY, will this introduce any *appearance* of *confuſion* into the univerſe; becauſe we can eaſily imagine, that the all-perfect author of it can *ſuſpend*, *moderate*, or *mix*, the influence of natural cauſes, without making any *viſible alteration* in the order of nature, or its eſtabliſhed laws. What are the *ſprings* of the moſt common events we know not; in numberleſs caſes, at leaſt, they are abſolutely imperceptible by us: and, therefore, we can never diſcover, when they are *touched* and *managed* by the ſupreme diſpoſing mind; it is out of our power, on ſuch occaſions as theſe, to perceive any thing *irregular*, or any thing *uncommon*.

AGAIN,

AGAIN, it may be queſtioned, whether any *ſuch laws* could be *originally* fixed in the univerſe, as, without an immediate direction and interpoſition of the DEITY in ſome *ſpecial* caſes, can poſſibly anſwer all the *ends* of *government*, with reſpect to *mankind* in this life; conſidered both as in a ſtate of *trial*, and as united together in *ſocieties*. For how a *certain* and *neceſſary* courſe of things can be completely, and minutely, *adapted* to the infinitely *various* and *uncertain* paſſions, deſigns, and purſuits of *free agents*, is extremely hard to be conceived.

BUT, FARTHER ſtill, we find, that the Creator of the world has put it even in the *power* of *men*, by a proper *application* and *conjunction* of ſeveral natural cauſes, to *produce* very ſurpriſing, very beneficial, effects: which would *not* have been produced, if theſe cauſes had remained *diſtinct*, as they lie in the *original* conſtitution, without the interpoſition of *human art*, and *induſtry*. Is it not then an abſurd limitation of the wiſdom, and omnipotence, of the DEITY (which can bring about infinitely more important events, by a *ſuitable combination* of various cauſes) to diſpute againſt ſuch *interpoſitions* as theſe (which are all *actings* of a *particular providence*) when we ourſelves can eaſily conceive, that the government of the world may, upon this ſuppoſition, be more *wiſely* conducted, and anſwer many more *valuable* purpoſes, than it can *otherwiſe* do? A concurrence of cauſes, *united* by a ſkilful direction (but for which *union*, without that ſkilful direction, there is, perhaps, no *proviſion* made in nature) may be the means of effecting unexpected and great revolutions, for the good of ſociety, and of mankind in general. And as theſe revolutions, and the benefits reſulting from them, would, in all probability, not have taken place, were it not for the exerciſe of a *particular providence*; this demonſtrates,

not

not only how reaſonable it is for us to admit it *here*, but to preſume the ſame in *many other* caſes, where it may be equally *neceſſary*, tho' that neceſſity lies more remote, from our dark and limited conceptions.

AND as for the contrary ſcheme of thoſe, who are *intirely*, and *excluſively*, for a *general providence*, it is impoſſible to prove, from any principles of reaſon, that this is the *actual ſtate* of things: Since we can never know, that the moſt common events ſpring from *properties* and *powers*, fixed and inherent in the *conſtitution* itſelf, without being acquainted with its internal frame, and with the proper neceſſary effects of *all* natural cauſes. Or if we ſhould admit, that it is really the *general* ſtate of the caſe, it would be impoſſible to prove, that it is the *whole* of the caſe, unleſs we were ſure, that the ſupreme governor of the world could have no *wiſe ends*, or *purpoſes*, to ſerve, but what are perfectly *provided for*, in the original diſpoſition and frame of nature.—Which obſervations muſt render every *probability*, that has been, or can be, urged for the doctrine of a *particular providence*, ſo much the more ſtrong and conſiderable.

BUT there is one topic more, that deſerves to be very diſtinctly noted, and that is, the *particular interpoſition* of the Supreme Being, as it may directly, and immediately, reſpect *moral agents*: Which, though it conſtitutes a *particular providence* of vaſt extent, thoſe who have oppoſed this opinion, have almoſt univerſally overlooked.

THAT the Infinite Being may have an immediate and eaſy *acceſs* to the *human mind*, whenever he pleaſes, is beyond all reaſonable contradiction. As he originally formed it, he muſt be thoroughly acquainted with its *internal frame*; with the *ſtrength* and *extent*

extent of its *faculties* in each individual; with all the different *ways*, in which it is capable of being *impreſſed*; and with what *variety*, and *degree* of *force*, impreſſions may be excited, and fixed, in it, conſiſtently with the natural and regular exerciſe of its moral powers, and its deſign and uſe in the creation. And whatever his infinite wiſdom knows to be *poſſible*, whatever it ſees, in any ſuppoſeable circumſtance, to be *fit* and *expedient*, his boundleſs power muſt enable him to *effect*. There is not, therefore, the leaſt difficulty in admitting, that the firſt cauſe of all things *can* influence the minds of men; but whether he ever *will*, whether he ever *does*, act in this manner, theſe are the only queſtions. Now, on the ſide of allowing this influence, there appear to me to be ſeveral clear and weighty probabilities; ſome of which are thoſe that follow.

FIRST, That many *wiſe* purpoſes may be ſerved by ſuch *an influence*. For the *mind*, being the *ſpring* of all human actions, whatever *influences* its *judgments*, *counſels*, and *determinations*, muſt, proportionably, influence the *ſtate* of *human affairs*; and may, in ſome inſtances, direct and regulate the *greateſt* and moſt *important* events. By GOD's interpoſing, in particular caſes, to moderate and govern the views, diſpoſitions, and paſſions of mankind, the courſe of the world may, in many reſpects, be *vaſtly different* from what it would, *otherwiſe*, have been: great *evils* may be prevented; extenſive and laſting *benefits* procured; and a *variety* of *uſeful ends* may be anſwered, with reſpect to particular moral agents, and public communities. And *every wiſe end*, that may, upon the whole, be *promoted* by ſuch a *particular providence*, muſt, in the neceſſary nature of things, be a *reaſon*, why it ſhould *actually take place*: ſince if GOD governs the moral world *at all*, he muſt do it in the moſt *perfect* manner.

AGAIN, it will, I make no doubt, be eaſily admitted, that the government of GOD is properly *ſuited* to the *natures* of thoſe beings, who are the *ſubjects* of it, and *adapted* to their *peculiar exigencies*. But it is certain in general, that the affairs of *mankind*, in which there are, and it is highly probable ever will be, infinite *variations* and *inequalities*, which, without deſtroying their *free agency*, cannot be *abſolutely fixed*: the affairs of *mankind*, I ſay, cannot, for this reaſon, be *regulated* by the *ſame kind* of eſtabliſhed laws, as obtain in the *material world*. And, conſequently, with reſpect to theſe, an *immediate interpoſition* ſeems to be extremely *natural*, if not, upon ſome occaſions, *neceſſary* to be ſuppoſed.

ADD to all this, what has been more than once obſerved before, that a very conſiderable part of the good and evil, that happens in the world, is evidently cauſed by the determinations and actions of men. And as this *good* and *evil* is the *reſult* of *free agency*, we can have no conception, how it is poſſible for the *proportions* of *both* to be rightly *balanced*, without introducing, upon ſome occaſions, the *exerciſe* of a *ſpecial* and *immediate influence*; how it is poſſible, that they ſhould be *balanced* in ſuch a manner, not only as the good of *ſocieties*, but even as a proper ſtate of *moral diſcipline*, may require. And as the chief end, of the *divine* adminiſtration, can juſtly be imagined to be nothing elſe, but the *rectitude* and *happineſs* of the moral world; *this* ſtrongly confirms all our *other* reaſonings, for a *particular* direction and regulation of their principles, diſpoſitions, and purſuits.

BESIDES, nothing can be *ſo ſuitable* to the character of GOD, as a being abſolutely perfect, the creator, governor, father, and friend of mankind, nothing *ſo exactly agrees* with his concern for the happineſs

pineſs of his creatures, and peculiar delight and complacency in virtue, as *that ſcheme*, which ſuppoſes him, by a gentle and gracious *communication* with the *mind*, to aſſiſt penitent ſinners in reforming their evil habits; to ſtrengthen the reſolution of the good and virtuous, and render their duty eaſy and delightful; to ſupply inward ſtreagth for extraordinary trials, and inward ſupport and comfort in ſpecial exigencies; to lay reſtraints on intemperate paſſion, and divert from hurtful purpoſes. And all this may be done, by ſuggeſting *proper thoughts* to the mind, in a *clear* and *ſtrong* light; and only with that *degree* and *force* of *impreſſion*, which is naturally adapted to *counterbalance* contrary prejudices, and *excite* and *fix* the attention.

FROM whence it follows, that it is entirely *analagous* to what we know to be the *common courſe* of things, in the *viſible* conſtitution of nature; in which, it was *originally intended*, and *provided*, that mankind ſhould mutually offer arguments, ſuggeſt powerful and determining motives, inform, convince, and perſuade each other; nay, in which it was originally provided, that ſuch occurrences ſhould frequently happen, as will, notwithſtanding our utmoſt reluctance and averſion to it, *engage* our *attention*, and almoſt *conſtrain* and *force* us to *reflect*. So that, inſtead of being, in the leaſt, inconſiſtent with the *eſtabliſhed laws* of nature, it may *itſelf*, for all that we are capable of advancing to the contrary, be *one* of its ſettled *ſecret* laws; i. e. as much *the general, regular courſe of* GOD's *operation upon mind*, as the laws of *gravity* are, with reſpect to *matter*.

I SHALL only obſerve farther, under this head, that this inward operation *alone* (*excluſive* of all immediate influences on neceſſary cauſes, and the laws fixed in the material world) will form a *particular providence* of prodigious *extent*, and of ſurpriſing *effect*. It

may have a great ſhare, in *fixing* the *ſtate* of our *fellow-creatures*; the temper of whoſe minds, the forming of their manners, their ſucceſs, proſperity, and honour, may very much depend on *our reſolutions* and *courſe* of *action*. And an *influence*, that is, at firſt, entirely *perſonal*, and where the ſubject of it too is of an *obſcure* character, may not only *expand*, and *dilate* itſelf to great *multitudes*, but ſettle at laſt, after ſeveral intermediate events impoſſible to be traced, in flagrant and grand events, that are of the higheſt concern to *whole ſocieties*. Farther, *impreſſions* made on ſeveral *different* minds, at *one* juncture, may produce effects neither *intended*, nor *foreſeen*, by either of the immediate agents, but, yet, effects that are *critical*, and, in the utmoſt degree, *momentous* and *uſeful*. And all may be owing to their being introduced at *proper ſeaſons*, and *uniting* their influence; and if the *interpoſition* had failed but in *one* of theſe inſtances, the whole deſign might have been rendered abortive.— To conclude, a proper and ſeaſonable *addreſs* to the minds of *princes* eſpecially, and *ſuch* as have the *conduct* of public affairs, may decide the *fate* of *nations*, and eſtabliſh *liberty*, or *ſlavery*. Such an influence, and at a certain period too, may promote and ſecure a laſting *tranquility*; and the want of it introduce the deſolations and horrors of *war*; which may be ſucceeded by a gradual *declenſion*, and, at length, by the utter *deſtruction*, of the moſt flouriſhing ſtates and empires. So that it appears, that it may reach to the principal affairs of the *preſent life*, and extend itſelf to an *eternal duration*.

AND now, having mentioned ſtates and kingdoms, it is natural for me to remark, what reaſon we have to believe, that the *care* and *wiſe government* of GOD is *eſpecially* concerned about theſe *public ſocieties*—becauſe they are, as it were, *abſtracts* of the *whole race* of mankind; and conſulting the good, of *one ſociety*, is providing

viding for a *vaſt number* of *individuals*; and in ſuch a way too, as is moſt conſiſtent with the *external conſtitution* of ſociety, and the *juſt ſubordination* of its ſeveral ranks—And becauſe, as *particular civil communities* flouriſh, or are oppreſſed and reduced, *liberty*, *juſtice*, and *religion*, will be proportionably affected, and *ſlavery*, *iniquity*, and *vile ſuperſtition*, be diffuſed and propagated.

THE external *ſtate* of the world, and the juſt outward *circumſtances* of every inhabitant in it, will in general be *completely* regulated, by over-ruling the affairs of *nations*. This therefore, if we confine our views to the *preſent* world, ſeems to be the more *immediate*, and the *principal*, concern of providence. And as it is not fit, that any man's *private concerns* ſhould be *otherwiſe* purſued by *himſelf*, than in *connection* with the *public welfare*; with this, which is the ſettled rule of *human duty*, we have reaſon to believe, that the *providence* of GOD does, in general, *correſpond*.

To which we may add, that kingdoms, and bodies politic, can only be rewarded, or puniſhed, as *ſuch*, in the *preſent* life. Every particular perſon in the community is, indeed, *accountable* to GOD, not only for his more private conduct, but for his behaviour as a *member* of the community; and, yet, there are wiſe reaſons, why *providence* ſhould *diſtinguiſh* public communities in the preſent world: all which reaſons are included in this one, *the good of ſociety*. For the happineſs of *ſocieties*, as ſuch, being only *preſent good*, they are to be conſidered in a quite *different* light, from the *ſeveral members* in their *private* capacity: and, therefore, GOD may render to theſe *ſingly*, according to every man's work, *hereafter*; and yet it may be neceſſary, to preſerve the external order and happineſs of the world, to give them, in the main, equal retribution, as *collective bodies* HERE.

THE *ſocial* happineſs of mankind is ſufficiently ſecured, by outward *peace* and *harmony*, by ſtrict *faith* and *honour*, and the practice of *mutual* and *relative* duties; and, for this reaſon, *civil laws* extend only to ſuch immoral *actions*, as are inconſiſtent with the *public* welfare and tranquility, and not to the *principles* and *habits* of the mind. There may, therefore, be a moſt wiſe and important *end* anſwered (if providence interpoſes in the concerns of *ſtates* and *kingdoms*) quite *diſtinct* from the *reaſons* of future rewards and puniſhments; which chiefly reſpect *conſcience*, and the *integrity*, or *corruption*, of the *heart*.

BESIDES, GOD has given *laws* to *nations*, without which they could not ſubſiſt, nor their mutual intereſts be rightly adjuſted; and *laws*, without the *ſanctions* of reward and puniſhment, are abſolutely ineffectual, to promote the ends of government. From all which we may, with the greateſt probability, conclude, that *national* and *political* events are under a peculiar *influence* and *direction* of providence; that righteouſneſs is the *ſtated means*, as by its natural tendency, ſo by recommending a civil community to the favour of almighty GOD, to raiſe its *grandeur*, and eſtabliſh its *proſperity*: but that, when the manners of a people are depraved, and idleneſs, luxury, ſenſuality, fraud, and a general diſſoluteneſs of living, prevail, they are expoſed to the *judicial diſpleaſure* of the great ſovereign of the world, and in the direct way to be *weakened* and *deſtroyed*.

AND the holy ſcriptures ſpeak of all the topics, which I have now inſiſted on, in great and lofty phraſe. *The kingdom*, i. e. the empire of the world, *is the* LORD'S *, in which he reigns as abſo-

* Pſ. xxii. 28.

lute

lute monarch, and has the whole at his diſpoſal: *The* LORD *hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all*[a]: The higheſt orders, of intelligent beings, have the honour to act as his miniſters, to execute his wiſe and gracious counſels; for he *maketh his angels ſpirits, and his miniſters a flame of fire*[b]: With reſpect to this globe, his providence is in a particular manner concerned about mankind; ſtrictly regarding the *evil* and the *good*, in order *to give* to *every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings*[c]: It is not, however, confined to them, but extends to every part, even, of the ſenſitive and inanimate creation: for he *openeth his hand, and ſatisfieth the deſire of every living thing*[d]; not a *ſparrow falls to the ground without your father*; and even *the very hairs of your head are all numbered*[e]. We are farther informed, that *in* his *hand* our *breath* is, *and* his are *all* our *ways*[f]: That *he* is *the governor among the nations*: That *the preparations of the heart in man, and the anſwer of the tongue*, is *from the* LORD[g]: That even *the king's heart* is *in the hand of the* LORD, as *the rivers of water*; *he turneth it whitherſoever he will*[h]: That the LORD *increaſeth the nations, and deſtroyeth them*; *he enlargeth the nations, and ſtraiteneth them* again[i]: and that he doth, according to his will, *in heaven, and in the earth, in the ſeas, and* in *all deep places*[k]. This is the ſtrong and expreſſive ſtile of *ſcripture*, in all which, and in various other paſſages of the ſame import, it only confirms (as we have before ſeen) and renders more authoritative, the ſenſe and voice of *reaſon*.

I SHALL only add, for the concluſion of this chapter, that the doctrine, of an univerſal over-ruling *providence*, is of the higheſt

[a] Pſ. ciii. 19. [b] Pſ. civ. 4. compared with Heb. i. 7. [c] Jer. xxxii. 19.
[d] Pſ. cxlv. 16. [e] Matt. x. 29, 30. [f] Dan. v. 23. [g] Prov. xvi. 1.
[h] Prov. xxi. 1. [i] Job xii. 23. [k] Pſ. cxxxv. 6.

importance to the peace of mens minds, and the happineſs of the world. In general, it muſt be infinitely more *eligible*, that all things ſhould be ordered and conducted by ſome wiſe principle, than that they ſhould happen, without any certain and determinate *ends* for the *good* of the creation, for want of a ſteddy and experienced hand to hold the reins of government, and manage the affairs of the world. When *families* and *kingdoms* are without a head, or under a weak and inſufficient conduct, how diſmal is the face of things! how liable are they to be troubled and perplexed, how ſubject to wild diſorder, and to innumerable ſhocks and convulſions! And if we ſuppoſe that there is no rule, no government of *the univerſe*, in which there is an almoſt infinite variety of concerns, that require a wiſe regulation and diſpoſal; what can reaſonably be expected but abſolute and endleſs confuſion! The univerſe needs a wiſe government, infinitely more than the largeſt empires, and political ſocieties among mankind; and therefore if, in theſe *leſſer bodies*, *anarchy* be naturally followed firſt by confuſion, and then by an utter diſſolution, how much rather may it be imagined, that this would be the unavoidable conſequence of it, with reſpect to the far greater, and *almoſt immenſe*, *ſyſtem* of the world! What would become of the ſecurity and happineſs of public ſocieties, if it was entirely ſubjected to the infinite varieties, and inconſiſtencies, of a blind and random *chance?* Or if irreverſible *fate* decided the ſtate of human affairs, moſt frightful conſequences would follow from it. One great event, or a concurrence of events, might make the diſtreſs and ruin of a nation *inevitable*. For it is in vain to oppoſe the moſt formidable force, or the higheſt refinements of policy, to the laws of *neceſſity*, which are ſtubborn and inflexible.

AND, with reſpect to *particular perſons*, the caſe muſt be equally deplorable. For nothing can occaſion more melancholy reflexions, in

in a judicious and conſiderate mind, than to have his happineſs lie at the mercy of ten thouſand *accidents*, which he can neither foreſee, nor prevent. The thought, that he has innumerable wants, which he cannot *ſupply*, and is expoſed to infinite dangers, which he cannot *avoid*, that his wiſeſt ſchemes may be *deſtroyed* in an inſtant, and his beſt enjoyments *blaſted*, notwithſtanding his utmoſt prudence and circumſpection, and, in ſhort, that he is blind and helpleſs in himſelf, and has *no ſuperior wiſdom* to guide, nor *power* to aſſiſt and ſupport him; this thought, I ſay, ſpreads darkneſs over the ſoul, and has a tendency to imbitter all its pleaſures. But when we are aſſured, that *no evil* can happen to us but by his *permiſſion*, who does always what is beſt, this diſplays to our view a moſt agreeable and delightful ſcene; becauſe it is the very thing that every wiſe man would chuſe ſhould be, and think vaſtly preferable to having the abſolute management of his affairs, in his own power. And, further, it is adapted to produce a becoming *firmneſs* and *conſtancy* of mind, to prevent our being *inſolent* in proſperity, or *dejected*, or *deſponding*, under adverſe and unfortunate occurrences; as it teaches us, that the great governor of the world can, by many accidents unknown to us, and impoſſible to be guarded againſt, *deprive* us of all our *riches*, *power*, and *grandeur*, whenever he pleaſes; and that there is no *diſtreſs* ſo intricate, no circumſtance of *miſery*, to human appearance ſo deſperate, but he can eaſily *recover* us out of it: and, in the mean time, we may be aſſured, that all his adminiſtrations are *wiſe*, and *juſt*, and calculated to advance the *general good* of the creation. We and all mankind have, therefore, the higheſt cauſe to join with the royal *Pſalmiſt*, and ſay—*The* LORD reigneth; *let the earth* rejoice *.

* Pſalm xvii. 1.

CHAP. VIII.

Of the Mercy, *or* Placability, *of* GOD.

THE point, which I intend in this chapter to explain and prove, is the *placability* of GOD. *This* I apprehend to be an eſſential and immutable character of the DEITY, his moſt amiable excellence, and ſupreme glory—'that he is not a being ſurrounded with inacceſſible *terrors*, and breathing nothing but eternal *vengeance* and *deſtruction* to all, who have been ſo unhappy as to deviate, from the law and order of their nature, into paths of vice and extravagance; but one that commiſerates their errors, is deſirous they ſhould return from their backſlidings, and ever ready to extend his *pardoning mercy* to his degenerate creatures, upon their *ſincere repentance* and *reformation*; not indeed a merely external or partial reformation; but one that includes in it the temper of virtue, and habits of purity, in ſome degree, at leaſt, eſtabliſhed in the ſoul, as well as outward rectitude of life.' And this with reſpect to *mankind*, as their ſituation, and the ſtate of their moral character, ſtand *at preſent*, is equally a firſt principle of all religion, with the being and providence of GOD themſelves.

IF it was poſſible, that, without admitting this truth, offices of religion might *ſtill* ſubſiſt among beings perfectly *innocent*, it muſt be a religion, as the ultimate object of it is ſuppoſed to be ſo rigidly ſevere, and void of mercy, of a very *dark* and *gloomy* tincture; and the ſervice, which it naturally dictated, would ſpring chiefly from *fear*, and not from the refined and generous motives of an affectionate *eſteem*, and *gratitude*.

BUT

BUT what ground can there be for acts of devotion, if the worſhippers are all *ſinners*, when they know that their moſt contrite and lowly ſupplications for *forgiveneſs* are to no purpoſe, that their offended ſovereign and judge is averſe to all terms of *reconciliation*, and his *favour*, once forfeited, is irrecoverably loſt for ever. The forlorn wretched ſinner is, by this thought, firſt rendered *deſperate*, and, in conſequence of that, *incorrigible*.

BESIDES, 'if it be not a principle of *natural religion*, that was, 'at all times, highly *probable* to human reaſon *duly exerciſed*, that 'the government of GOD is *favourable* and *propitious* to penitents, '*all the nations*, that have been deſtitute of the light of *revelation*, '*i. e.* the far *greater part* of the world, in every ſucceſſive gene-'ration of mankind, muſt have been rendered incapable, by the 'rigour of their ill fate and their unavoidable unhappy circum-'ſtances, of *any religion*, beſides the mere anxious and torment-'ing dread of an uncontroulable ungracious power; to whom, they 'would reckon it their utmoſt poſſible miſery, to be ſubject.' But the authority of true religion is eternal, it is an univerſal tie on human nature, as well as on all rational natures; the foregoing, therefore, muſt be a falſe and injurious repreſentation of it; and it can only be founded on the contrary principle, of GOD's *condeſcending* and *forgiving mercy*, which I am now attempting to illuſtrate.

I PROCEED, therefore, to a diſtinct and thorough examination of the whole of this important argument, by conſidering, 'what 'clear and unqueſtionable *evidences* there are, from the *natural* '*light* of *reaſon*, that GOD is *placable*, and will *receive* his guilty 'creatures into *favour*, upon ſincere repentance:' *i. e.* in truth, what ground there is for maintaining and cultivating, *any* offices of

religion, amongſt imperfect and ſinful creatures, where *revelation* is unknown, or whether *religion*, generous, joyful, acceptable religion, be confined to *Jews* and *Chriſtians* only, or be as extenſive as *human nature* itſelf. The proofs of the *latter* of theſe, as derived from the *divine placability*, and to be derived from that *alone*, are various; which I ſhall endeavour to produce in ſuch an order, that they may riſe, gradually, as near to a demonſtration, as the nature of the argument will admit.

AND let us, here, begin with a reflection that is moſt obvious, and adapted to ſtrike and convince all mankind, and that is, what are juſtly eſteemed acts of *goodneſs*, and excellencies of *moral character* amongſt *ourſelves*; and carrying our reaſonings up, from *thence*, to the father and governor of all intelligent and moral natures. It is in this way only, that we are capable, in general, of aſcending and deducing the moral perfections of the ſupreme Being; and of forming a diſtinct idea of the *particular attributes*, that are neceſſary to be aſcribed to him.

Now the univerſal reaſon of men has concurred in this judgment, that *juſtice* and *goodneſs* are real excellencies; and, therefore, it has ever acknowledged the DEITY to be abſolutely and univerſally *juſt*, and *good*: *mercy*, it has always looked upon, as an eſſential branch of goodneſs; and, upon that account, has celebrated his moſt glorious nature as ſupremely *merciful*: 'To be inclined to *forgive* is 'included in the general idea, of a benevolent and gracious diſpo-'ſition; to be *unpropitious* and *inflexible* is ſtigmatized, and ab-'horred, as the character of malice and cruelty.' The *firſt* of theſe, therefore, it muſt of neceſſity, and following the order of its own reaſonings in all other caſes, ſuppoſe to be the *actual diſpoſition* of the DEITY, if he be indeed a merciful ſovereign; and the *latter* cannot

cannot *poſſibly* belong to him, unleſs he be of a ſtern and arbitrary nature.

AND when mens *general abſtract notions*, of moral properties and characters, are ſo *clear* and *juſt*, and, upon the *whole*, ſo *uniform*, that they ſhould ſeem to have no *certain ideas* at all, when they come to ſpeak of the *divine* character; this is ſuch a degree of inconſiſtency, as muſt either argue the capriciouſneſs and weakneſs of their reaſon, or the prodigious force of prejudice. In all *other* examples, of the *like* kind, their apprehenſions are fixed; they can *decide* without the leaſt diffidence or heſitation; they agree in *one* ſentiment; they are prompted by nature, and the common notions of right and wrong, *thus* to agree; and is it not extremely ſtrange, that they ſhould not follow the ſame guide, and adhere to the ſame rule of judgment, in *every parallel* caſe without exception? This, however, is the true ſource of their doubts and errors; by which they ſo often *limit* the *tender compaſſions*, and *free mercies*, of GOD, and cloud their glory—and eſpecially in the inſtance, that is, at preſent, to be conſidered. For,

PUT the caſe of an *inexorable father*, who refuſes to *pardon* the diſobedience and extravagance of his children, though moſt unfeignedly and humbly *penitent*; that *ſpurns* at their ſubmiſſion, and treats them with *equal rigour* when they are *reformed*, as while they were *abandoned* to ſenſuality and riot, and *ſtubborn* in their vicious follies. Or imagine a caſe of more indifference, where there are not ſuch ſpecial affinities and cloſe ties of nature; the caſe not of *father* and *ſon*, but of *man* and *man*. The injurious perſon *relents*; is ſtruck with deep *compunction* and *remorſe*; *acknowledges* his ill conduct, with all its aggravations; implores *forgiveneſs* for it; endeavours, by all the methods that are in his power, to *repair* the wrong;

wrong; is obſequious, and conſtant, in yielding *obliging* and *friendly offices* to him, whom he had, before, treated unworthily; and gives the ſtrongeſt proofs of a thorough *change* in his inward temper, as well as in the courſe of his external conduct—Would not every one immediately *deteſt* the *father*, as hard-hearted and unnatural, and the *man*, as in a manner alienated from humanity, and averſe to true goodneſs? And why! not, ſurely, upon this account alone, becauſe it is the behaviour of a frail, imperfect, and mutually dependent ſpecies of creatures, one towards another; but becauſe it is *unreaſonable*, *baſe*, and *vile* in itſelf. Such a conduct would be cenſured, as obdurate pride and cruelty, not only in *human*, but in *angelical*, natures.

AND 'ſhall the glorious majeſty of heaven be *debaſed*, ſhall his 'boundleſs benevolence be *ſtained*, by ſuch groſs and foul impu-'tations? Shall what is ſo notoriouſly inconſiſtent, with *inferior* 'and *limited*, be aſcribed to *infinite* goodneſs? Shall GOD be re-'preſented as the *obſtinate reſentful father*, the *ſevere unrelenting* '*governor*, the *revengeful* and *implacable enemy*, that among *men* 'are hated, and marked with uncommon ignominy?' This is quite ſhocking, and horrid to all rational thought.

AGAIN, *implacable* mercy ſeems to carry in it little leſs of a contradiction, than *unmerciful* benevolence. *Relief* and *pardon* are the proper, the natural, effects of mercy; and therefore the *miſerable*, the *truly penitent*, muſt be the direct and moſt ſuitable objects of mercy: but *chiefly* the *penitent*, not only as fit, in their own immediate character, to be favourably regarded; but, as they muſt otherwiſe be left involved in the moſt dreadful irretrievable miſery, that can befal human nature. 'If '*theſe*, therefore, when they may be raiſed to happineſs, when 'they

'they aſpire after it, and would vigorouſly purſue it, are diſcou-
'raged in their worthy emulation, cramped in their endeavours,
'and *left to periſh*; is not this dethroning *mercy*, and placing *ſe-*
'*verity* in the ſupreme ſeat of government?'

No, it may be ſaid, mercy may be manifeſted in ſome *other way*, than in abſolutely forgiving penitents, and receiving them into the favour of their offended father and judge; and, particularly, by a *mildneſs*, and *moderation*, in *puniſhing*. To which I anſwer, that it might doubtleſs be more illuſtriouſly, and amiably, diſplayed by *both* theſe methods; and by taking away the *firſt*, the moſt noble, the moſt generous, the moſt extenſive in the communication of good, this adorable attribute of the DEITY muſt ſtill be, in a great meaſure, defaced.

BESIDES, 'not to riſe to the *ſtrict meaſure* of juſtice, in *puniſh-*
'*ing*, is a degree of *forgiveneſs*.' For if when *no puniſhment at all* is inflicted, the offender is *abſolutely* forgiven; *according to the degree*, in which a deſerved puniſhment is remitted, is ſin *proportionably* forgiven. *Forgiveneſs*, therefore, even upon the foot of this objection, is not abſolutely inconſiſtent with the *juſtice* of the DEITY; not even with that *fancied* attribute of juſtice, which has been ſet up in oppoſition *to* mercy, and allowed to over-rule and ſuſpend its exerciſe.—Why then ſhould it be *limited?* Why ſhould it be *partial?* Why not *univerſal?* 'Why ſhould it remit *any*
'*thing*, where there is *no worthineſs* in the object, as in puniſhing,
'even obſtinate and incorrigible offenders, *leſs* than their iniqui-
'ties deſerve; and why not remit *all*, when the object is *renovated*,
'and *changed* to a better purpoſe and courſe of life;' and conſequently, as will hereafter be more particularly ſhewn, when the *cauſe* of all wiſe and juſt diſpleaſure *ceaſes?*

SUFFER

Suffer me to add, that by confining the *mercies* of God which are ſupreme, and the ſcope of his *forgiveneſs*, we obſtruct the courſe of *human mercy*. For to be *merciful* as God *is merciful*, as it is the preſcribed rule of revealed religion, is all, likewiſe, that nature and reaſon can require. *His example* is, and muſt be, the ſtandard, the great, the unerring, the invariable pattern, to be propoſed for univerſal imitation. As wilfully to fall below it, or deviate from it, will convict us of *cruelty*; ſo, to endeavour to excel it muſt be *inſolence* and *raſhneſs*. 'If, therefore it be *improbable in nature*, 'that God will expreſs *any* mercy to penitents, *man* ought, alſo, 'to be *abſolutely* implacable in his reſentments. If it be *doubtful*, 'in the ſame degree man ſhould doubt and heſitate, and *ſuſpend* and '*check* the generous motions, and kind relentings, of his benevo-'lence. If God's mercy be *partial*, that of the creature ſhould 'be, at leaſt, equally *imperfect*.' We now talk of *mercy*, not where the circumſtances are *different*, but to be exerciſed upon one *uniform* reaſon, that of true repentance; where the *original ground* of inflicting puniſhment is removed, and the *qualities* of the ſubject are entirely altered: and if this be, ever, a *right motive* to *forgive*, it muſt operate, in the *ſtrongeſt* manner, in a being incapable of paſſion, and of pure and unconfined benevolence.

The rule therefore, which I have juſt laid down, as to the *proportion*, which the *placability* of man ought to bear to *that* of the Supreme Mind, is certain and unalterable. And, from hence, it unavoidably follows, that the ſuppoſing God, in the diſplays of *nature*'s light, not to be *at all propitious*, muſt, in the opinion of the majority of mankind, who are unacquainted with the wiſer and more gentle doctrine of *revelation*, give a ſanction to *revenge* and *cruelty*; and that the eclipſing his *mercy*, in *any degree*, weakens the

the chief and immutable principles of ſocial humanity, and happineſs. And what is calculated to produce ſuch ill effects, in the natural ſtate of mankind, we muſt have the utmoſt reaſon to reject as a falſhood; becauſe it interferes with the univerſally acknowledged *duties* of that ſtate; and with *obligations* quite *independent* on any *new* diſcoveries of revealed religion.—Whenever our *imitation* of the DEITY would *deprave* our morals, inſtead of exalting and refining them to the utmoſt pitch, we may be infallibly ſure, that the *character*, which in ſuch caſes we are perſuaded to copy after, is framed by *ſuperſtition* and *prejudice*, and not by reaſon.

AGAIN, the moſt *probable* end, which GOD could have in view both in creation and providence, is the communication and diffuſion of *good*. This neceſſarily infers, 'that he will *hinder* the enjoyment of *no* good, of which the intelligent creature is a *fit* ſubject; *none*, which it is *morally qualified* for the *enjoyment* of, and 'to *improve* to the producing *greater* good.' But the *penitent*, when thoroughly reformed, and raiſed to virtuous reliſhes and virtuous habits, has as much the *temper*, which is *naturally* adapted to *happineſs*, as it would have had (with the ſame ſtrength and extent of virtuous diſpoſitions) had it never been groſsly corrupted, and degenerate from the rectitude of its original frame. And, therefore, whatever *difference* may be made, between *penitence* and *ſteady unperverted integrity*, with reſpect to the *poſitive diſtribution* of rewards (which revelation plainly enforces, and reaſon can never invalidate) yet if the *faculty* be *alike* in both, the *natural pleaſures* of the penitent cannot be *diminiſhed*, 'without a volun-'tary prevention of *good*, and of a *ſuitable good* upon the whole.'

To put the ſame general argument in a ſomewhat different light —Does GOD in truth deſire, that his reaſonable creatures ſhould be

happy? And is *virtue* the *way* to happineſs? Is it the *temper* of happineſs? Is it the chief *qualification* for the enjoyment of it, and the firſt *ingredient* in it? If GOD is not willing that mankind ſhould be happy, he is neither their *father*, nor *friend*. If *virtue* is not the direct path, the high road, to happineſs, rational beings can have no poſſibility of being *ever happy*, with reſpect to their peculiar and more exalted powers; becauſe *ſenſual* gratifications are only ſuited to the low inſtincts of animal life: *folly* is their ſhame, and *vice* their neceſſary miſery. '*Repentance* then, by introducing an abhorrence of 'moral evil, and the oppoſite habits of virtue, muſt of neceſſity 'open an agreeable and bright ſcene of *happineſs*, unleſs darkened by 'ſome *malevolent* power. For can we ſuppoſe, that any *good* power 'will voluntarily *intervene*, to *hinder real virtue*, by *what means* '*ſoever* introduced and eſtabliſhed, from inheriting its appointed 'and fixed reward? Can it be the act of the Supreme Power *unli-* '*mited in goodneſs?*' No: this is, and muſt be, impoſſible for ever.

I NOW proceed to argue, the ſame moſt important point, from other topics—and, particularly, from the *ultimate end* of *puniſhments*, in the œconomy and order of the ſupreme government of GOD; from the only rational and immutable *ground* of his *diſpleaſure* againſt ſin; and the neceſſary *conſequences* of *that change*, in the diſpoſitions and ſtate of human nature, which is introduced by *true repentance*.

IF indeed the *penalties*, which the infinite ruler of the world has annexed to a wilful contempt of his ſacred laws, ſprang from a *cruel* and *vindictive* temper; it might juſtly be feared, 'that *re-* '*pentance* would be of little avail, either to *prevent* their being '*inflicted*, or *mitigate* the *terror* of their *complete* and *full execu-* '*tion*.' For who could hope to make ſtern *cruelty* relent, or to appeaſe

appeaſe *revenge*, which is naturally barbarous and inſatiable? Or if they were the reſult of wild *inſtinct*, or of furious and tranſporting *paſſion*; the conſequence would, upon the whole, be much the *ſame*, 'notwithſtanding the moſt *ſincere* and *thorough reforma-* 'tion of the offender.' For paſſion not only over-rules all dictates of reaſon, and ſuppreſſes all ſentiments of benevolence and commiſeration, but pays no regard to *juſtice* itſelf. It is neither wiſe, impartial, nor generous, and whatever appearances of *either* of theſe may, in ſome inſtances, be intermingled and blended with its exceſſes, they are entirely *ſtarts* and *deviations* from its native temper; they are always the *effects* of calmer and better principles, which, though it has in a great meaſure clouded and weakned, it has not been able wholly to extinguiſh. *Paſſion* therefore cannot, in the DEITY, be ſuppoſed to be the ſpring of *puniſhment*, without effacing his *wiſdom*; nor *revenge*, without quite expunging his *mercy*.

BUT if the *puniſhments* appointed for vice, by the firſt and ſovereign power, have their foundation in *wiſdom*, and *rectitude* of nature, and are intended to anſwer *beneficial* and *ſalutary* purpoſes, if their principal end be to reſtrain licentious paſſions, and inſpire a horror of all wickedneſs, and voluntary corruption of our moral faculties, from a view of its tremendous and fatal conſequences; 'this *end* is moſt completely *ſecured*, by the *repentance* and *refor-* 'mation of the ſinner.' If *puniſhments* are in their deſign *medicinal*—when the diſtemper of the mind is cured; when it is purged of all its evil diſpoſitions, and inveterate wrong habits; and recovered to the *ſoundneſs* and *health* of virtue, and to its *true life*; the *medicine* has produced its natural *effect*, and therefore, with reſpect to that particular ſubject, there can be no farther *need* of it. And, to aſſert the contrary, is really to ſuppoſe, that the almighty, and (as he is univerſally declared to be) moſt wiſe and gracious

ruler of the world chooſes rather, 'that puniſhments ſhould be 'actually executed, i. e. in other words, that the original and true 'design of them, in all well conſtituted and equal governments, 'ſhould *not* be *obtained*; than that the offender ſhould rectify his 'errors, revert to his duty, and the right purſuit of his own happineſs, and, thereby, render the puniſhment *uſeleſs*.'

WHENEVER therefore we hear or read of punitive, or, as it is ſometimes ſtiled, *vindictive*, juſtice as an attribute of the ſovereign all-governing mind, eſſentially and immutably inherent in his nature, theſe expreſſions are capable of no other reaſonable, no other pious ſenſe but this; that it is neceſſary for the DEITY to *puniſh* upon *all occaſions*, where puniſhments are proper and expedient, and ſubſervient to the univerſal good: *i. e.* to *puniſh* the ſtubborn guilty, both by way of juſt correction to *themſelves*, and terror to *others*; that they may ſtand in humble awe, and dread the thought of being corrupt and degenerate. If they denote any thing either of deliberate rigour, or of tumultuous wrath and fury in GOD, which no humiliations, no endeavours of his creatures and ſubjects, can aſſuage and pacify, they really repreſent him, according to the cooleſt and wiſeſt ſentiments of nature, as an *evil ſpirit* inveſted with univerſal empire; and are not more repugnant to demonſtrations of reaſon, than to the concurrent ſtrain and tenor of revelation: in which he is deſcribed as one, to whom *judgment* is a *ſtrange work*—averſe from his ſtated unchangeable diſpoſition, unleſs urged to it by neceſſary maxims of *wiſdom* and *goodneſs*, as one in whom *fury* reſideth not, as *ſlow to anger*, and abundant *in mercy*.

AGAIN, if GOD is not propitious to penitents, 'the *vicious* ſeem 'to be left without a ſufficient *encouragement*, without, indeed, a 'motive

'*motive* (sufficient to controul appetite and habit) to a *reformation* 'of their evil manners.' And yet is it not reasonable to suppose, that the government of GOD should supply *every* just *motive*, *every* proper *encouragement*, to promote the great purpose, which itself has in view, the rectitude and consequent happiness of the moral creation? 'Creatures *once* corrupted, and by the error of their own 'choice degenerate, may not be, *in nature*, irrecoverably lost.' But how shall they be reclaimed, in opposition to present temper, and the strong importunate sollicitations of habitual appetite, if they are persuaded that they shall never be *forgiven?* They want all possible influence on the side of *virtue*; and can we imagine, that the supreme friend and patron of virtue will afford them but a slight and unavailing influence? 'Are *intelligent beings*, whether for a 'longer or shorter space erroneous, to be absolutely *abandoned* to 'remediless misery! By the *wise* and *good* GOD abandoned! Are '*penitents* to be thus *abandoned*, though they are reduced from 'their errors!'

LET me add to all that has been already said, that, upon the very same principles of *reason*, and considerations of *wisdom*, that GOD is displeased with, and determined to punish, the *incorrigibly vicious*, he should, one would think, pardon and favour the *penitent*. Vice is an *opposition* to his own most excellent and perfect nature; repentance introduces habits of virtue, which are a *conformity* to it: and can he abhorr the *contrariety*, without taking a pleasure, equal to that abhorrence, in the *resemblance* of his moral perfections? Exactly, in the proportion, that vice is horrid, and merits punishment, virtue is lovely, and the proper subject of reward. Penitence therefore *covers* * guilt, by introducing a state of mind *right* in itself, and a *natural recommendation* to the favour of the Su-

* Psalm xxxii. 1.

preme

preme Governor. When a ſinner is *reformed*, he is, in his own intrinſic *complexion* of mind, *amiable*: if corrupt propenſions are *ſubdued*, and good diſpoſitions *acquired*, he is as amiable, to the *extent* of his good temper, as *virtue* itſelf is amiable—But can he be amiable in *reaſon*, without appearing ſo to the *divine mind?* Can he be amiable to the divine mind, without being *favoured?* Can he be favoured, and yet rendered *miſerable upon the whole?* Can general approbation and diſlike, love and hate, be exerciſed, *at once*, towards the *ſame* object? Then all contradictions may be true, and there is an abſolute ſubverſion of reaſon.

I NOW paſs on to another obſervation, *viz.* that the *preſent condition* of human nature is, and is generally underſtood to be, a ſtate of *probation* and *diſcipline*. But if this be a juſt idea of it, it muſt belong to it *entirely*, and *throughout*, as long as it is *capable* of being a ſtate of *trial*; and, conſequently, till it is abſolutely *impoſſible*, for the *probationary beings* included in it, to be *raiſed* to *ſentiments* and *habits* of *virtue*. Beſides, a *general* ſtate of probation evidently implies in it, that it is intended to diſcover, how the *moral* qualifications and merits, of the perſons concerned, will turn out upon *the whole*, in the *conſummation* of the ſcene; and, conſequently, that thoſe who are, in the final reſult, *truly virtuous*, will be *happy* upon *the whole*, and the vicious miſerable. The *penitent* virtuous, therefore, muſt have a juſt *ground* to hope for happineſs, upon the moſt exact and worthy eſtimate that we can frame of human life; and a ſtate of future *miſery*, upon *the whole*, is *only* reſerved for the obſtinate and irreclaimable.

I SHALL only add, under this head of *direct* arguments for the placability or propitious nature of GOD, that conſidering the preſent frail and weak condition of mankind, the innumerable obſtructions, they

they meet with, to the due clearneſs and force of reaſon; their inſenſible prejudices; their many ſtrong, and, oftentimes, impetuous paſſions, derived from nature; their avocations from moral thinking, by the employments and cares of life; abundant temptations exciting, and numberleſs examples patronizing, and, in every ſituation and ſphere of influence, giving a ſanction to ill conduct; it is ſcarce *poſſible*, they ſhould *never* offend: it is hardly *probable*, they will but *ſeldom* offend. I mention theſe things, not to diminiſh the *guilt* of their *real wilful* crimes, but only as what may be admitted as a *plea* for *mercy*, when errors are ſincerely *repented of*, and carefully *relinquiſhed*. And *this* it undeniably is, or the fate of mankind is deplorably hard, and rigorous.

BUT if *mercy* be *at all* proper to be ſhewn, how ſhall it be *confined?* The *firſt* offence muſt not abſolutely prevent the *exerciſe* of it, with reſpect to a race of creatures ſo imperfect in their make, and from the unalterable circumſtances of their being, ſo liable to error. The *ſecond* offence, likewiſe, can never be allowed to be an *infallible bar* to the divine favour; becauſe, then, all mankind are unavoidably doomed to miſery. The ſame holds true, if we proceed farther, with reſpect to the greater part of the ſpecies, who, without a *forgiving* and *reconcileable* DEITY, are irretrievably loſt for ever. I deſire, therefore, to be informed, as forgiveneſs muſt *often* be *granted*, *where* it will of neceſſity *ſtop*; or *where* the abſolutely unpardonable ſtage of human follies, and exceſſes, *commences*. This the objector, againſt the propitiouſneſs and condeſcending mercy of GOD, to his obnoxious guilty creatures humbly *repenting*, and *ſincerely reformed*, can never fix: and, therefore, his objections ſeem to be, in the main, groundleſs, nay, farther, a heap of abſurd and inconſiſtent contradictions.

LET

LET us, however, briefly examine the particular objections, that have been made to this fundamental article both of natural, and revealed, religion.

IT is urged, in the FIRST place, that *repentance* is not an *atonement* for paſt miſconduct. This is allowed: 'but is it not a *natural qualification* for the enjoyment of *moral happineſs?* Is it 'not a *worthy* and *ſuitable recommendation* to *mercy?*'

AGAIN, *repentance*, it is ſaid, does not *merit* forgiveneſs—'Nor 'does *innocence itſelf*, in ſtrict reaſon, *merit* a reward; much leſs 'an *eternal* reward, and of the moſt conſummate felicity, that 'human nature is capable of. But it may be *becoming* infinite '*goodneſs*, to confer favours, that cannot, in *equity*, be claimed; 'or there is no room left for the exerciſe of *mercy*.'

BUT penitence, though it alters the *temper* of the ſinner's *mind*, and his *moral qualities*, is, in many inſtances, no *reparation* of the *miſchievous conſequences* of his former diſorders; eſpecially, of thoſe that relate to his fellow-creatures, and the general intereſts of human ſociety.—To which I anſwer, 'that it prevents the *repetition* 'of them, and that any conſtitution, founded on the *intervention* 'of a ſuperior nature, can do *no more:* for the *death* of *Chriſt*, 'which is repreſented, in the goſpel, as the ground of *forgiveneſs*, 'or rather, perhaps, as a ſolemn memorial of GOD's *placability* to 'mankind, *no more rectifies* the preſent irregular and miſchievous 'effects of vice, than bare repentance can do without it.'

AND whereas it has been objected, that repentance does not rectify the *natural miſeries*, which are conſequent upon vice in this world,

world, as *puniſhments* to the ſinner himſelf; and that, therefore, it may not hinder *their taking place*, likewiſe, in the future, the everlaſting, ſtate of man's being.—It will be immediately ſuggeſted, in reply to this apprehended difficulty; *firſt*, that this is only alleging what is merely *poſſible*, againſt all the reaſons that have been before urged, with the greateſt and ſtrongeſt degree of *probability*; and, therefore, ought to weigh no more, than as *barely poſſible* againſt *moſt highly probable*, which, if in the opinion of judicious and conſiderate men it be any thing at all, is, however, *next to nothing*. *Secondly*, that the preſent, and future, ſtates of human nature are eſſentially *different*; the *one* being a ſtate of minority and initiation, the *other* of confirmation and reward. And, *thirdly*, that all the *permanent* evil conſequences of vice reſult, in this life, from the animal frame; which *ceaſing* to be a clog and incumbrance, to virtuous ſouls, hereafter, its weakneſſes and evil appetites muſt, alſo, *ceaſe* of courſe.

Thus have I, largely, proved the *gracious* and *placable* character of the Supreme Father and Governor of mankind, from principles of (as I apprehend) univerſal and eternal *reaſon*. And theſe arguings are ſo far from being invalidated, or rendered in the leaſt degree doubtful, that they are juſtified, and confirmed, by the whole doctrine of *revealed religion*; which ſuppoſes what I am now arguing for, as well as the being and moral government of God, to be the dictate and voice of *nature*. That the Almighty Sovereign and Ruler of the world is *actually* propitious, *revelation* clearly teaches. Nay, it is generally thought to be one of its chief and moſt important uſes, that it eſtabliſhes this great truth.

And does not this neceſſarily lead us to conclude, that God is by *nature*, propitious? Can we believe him to be *now* diſpoſed to

pardon penitents, without admitting at the ſame time, that this is his *eſſential* and *unchangeable* diſpoſition? Is he capable of acquiring *new* habits, of altering, and correcting, his *original* propenſions? Is it poſſible for him to act in *contradiction* to himſelf; to introduce new orders and arbitrary rules of government; 'to publiſh *declarations* of mercy, *exceeding* his *unalterable diſpoſitions* to 'mercy?'

IF it be true, that GOD has, in the holy *Scriptures*, repreſented himſelf as a *gracious* and *placable* being; 'this could *only* be, be-'cauſe it was *fit*, becauſe it was *wiſeſt* and *beſt* upon the whole, that '*forgiveneſs* of ſin ſhould be granted upon the humble *repentance* 'and ſincere *reformation* of the offender.' For the firſt all-perfect mind, as has been already obſerved, cannot be influenced by *caprice*, or *paſſion*, by uncertain indeterminate ſtarts of *good*, or *ill*, *humour*; but the whole plan of his government, and all his operations, reſult from neceſſary *rectitude*, and *benevolence*: he can therefore purſue no courſe of adminiſtration, nor fix any *order* of *diſpenſing* his *mercy*, but what is, and from no other principle but becauſe it is, the moſt *complete* in its kind. And if, as from hence it unavoidably follows, it be abſolutely *beſt* upon the whole, that *true penitents* ſhould be received into *favour*; this muſt be an *univerſal* truth, an *eternal* truth, and as undoubtedly a maxim of *natural*, as it is of *revealed*, religion.

BESIDES, the general ſcheme of revelation not only ſuppoſes that GOD is *placable*, but various paſſages, in it, contain the cleareſt and ſtrongeſt intimations of this important truth. There is one *alone*, that is fully ſufficient to decide the whole controverſy: in which, the *name* of GOD [*i. e.* the *real character*, by which he is to be known, and celebrated in all ages] is *proclaimed* to be—*The* LORD,

LORD, *the* LORD GOD, *gracious and merciful, forgiving iniquity, and tranſgreſſion,* and ſin *. This is declared, not to be the name of a national and ſelected DEITY, not of the GOD of the *Jews* only, but of JEHOVAH, *the ſelf-exiſtent,* the parent of nature, and the GOD of the whole univerſe.

IN other places, which have a more immediate connection with the intereſts of the *Hebrew* nation, he is characteriſed as the GOD of *Abraham*, of *Iſaac*, and of *Jacob*; but in this, only as *the eternal unoriginated being*. Every thing therefore, inſerted here, muſt be conſidered as the *abſolute character* of the Supreme Being, as a branch of the *immutable idea* of him; and, conſequently, as admitting of *no variation* in any age, nor with reſpect to any nation. Beſides, a *particular character*, which GOD had been pleaſed to aſſume for *ſpecial* reaſons, could not, with any propriety, be ſtiled the *name* of *the* LORD; ſince it is what, upon the preſent ſuppoſition, he could not be *known* or *diſtinguiſhed* by, except by a very ſmall, and, with reſpect to the whole community, a very inconſiderable and trifling part of mankind. To this let it be added, that all the *other attributes*, mentioned in the paſſage above referred to, of ſelf-exiſtence, univerſal ſovereignty, mercy, long-ſuffering, and an invariable diſpoſition, for the ſupport of moral government, to puniſh the incorrigible guilty, are *eſſential properties* of GOD's all-perfect nature; this therefore, of his *readineſs to pardon upon repentance*, being inſerted in a catalogue of *inſeparable* properties, can, by no rules of equal and fair interpretation, be aſſigned to a different claſs, againſt the moſt weighty preſumptions and probabilities of reaſon.

* Exod. xxxiv. 5, 6, 7.

AND it can be no diſhonour to *Chriſtianity*, that this point may be traced by *reaſon*'s light; becauſe if it was *actually* obſcured and doubted of, and mankind had no rational conceptions concerning it, the merit of the goſpel in aſcertaining it, and fixing it on its right baſis, would be exactly the ſame, as if, by the mere guidance and direction of nature, it was abſolutely *undiſcoverable*—Would any man diſpute, whether it was *a favour*, whether it was of *great uſe*, to *enlighten* and *guide* the *blind*, till he was convinced, whether they were *naturally* blind, or *accidentally* blind?

AGAIN, if it be an advancement of the excellence and honour of *Chriſtianity*, that it teaches principles which *reaſon* could not dictate; it will then unavoidably follow, that if reaſon could diſcover *no truths* at all, relating to the DEITY, this *utter darkneſs*, of the human underſtanding, muſt redound, *ſo much the more*, to the credit and exaltation of the Chriſtian ſcheme. But does any ſober man think it a diſparagement to the *Scripture* accounts of GOD, that reaſon can demonſtrate the *being* of a GOD; or to thoſe of the conduct and order of his *providence*, that nature teaches not only the *reality*, but the *wiſdom*, *rectitude*, and *goodneſs* of providence? If *no notion* of GOD could be traced out, by the original light of reaſon, the very idea of *a revelation* from God muſt be abſurd, and could ſcarce gain admittance into the human mind. It muſt be a mere ſuperſtructure of fancy and wild chimera, without any viſible foundation, on which to raiſe it. Its pretenſions would not appear to be ſufficiently recommended to, and could indeed ſcarce claim, a ſolemn examination. And if the *narrower* the bottom of revelation is in *nature*, and *univerſal idea*, it muſt, of neceſſity, be a more *ſuſpected* ſcheme; the more it is *extended*, or the more its doctrines *correſpond* with *common principles* of reaſon,

ſon, the more forcibly muſt it demand *univerſal reverence* and *eſteem*.

To which I may add, that the evidence of revealed truth (which is of a *diſtinct* kind) joined with natural probabilities, are allowed to increaſe *the proof upon the whole*. They are, indeed, the ſame as *two* different *credible* teſtimonies, mutually illuſtrating and enforcing each other; and, therefore, to ſubſtract *either*, and, of conſequence, the teſtimony of *reaſon*, muſt *impair* and *leſſen* the evidence upon the whole. So that ſuch an attempt does not, at all, more weaken *nature*, than it hurts, and obſtructs, the influence of all *true revelation*: they muſt both *ſtand*, or *fall*, together. And eternal reaſon being the *firſt*, the *ſupreme*, ſtandard, by which all pretended revelations muſt be *tried*, as nothing can be *admitted* by men, without renouncing their intelligent character, as an article of revealed truth, which is manifeſtly *repugnant* to principles of reaſon; ſo, the clearer and ſtronger the *impreſſions* of this original light are, which it bears upon it, the more it muſt always have of the *internal ſtamp*, and *character*, of *divinity*.

WE ſee then, upon the whole, notwithſtanding the viſible marks of GOD's *propitiouſneſs*, and *forgiving mercy*, that appear in nature, the *excellency* of the *Chriſtian* revelation, and its *eminent uſe*, worthy the extraordinary interpoſition of the all-governing mind, and demanding eternal gratitude from thoſe nations, which are favoured with the *light* of it. And this will appear in a yet clearer view, if it be conſidered, that though *right reaſon* be *uniform*, and, in itſelf, the *ſame*, yet mens *actual reaſonings*, even on ſubjects of the higheſt importance, are vaſtly *different*; occaſioned by their different capacities, tempers, circumſtances, habits, converſation, and uſual train of thinking: and, conſequently, it can hardly be expected, that

that they will receive ſuch univerſal *ſatisfaction* in *this way*, as they may by a particular and expreſs *revelation*, acknowledged to be a deciſive and ultimate authority.

Besides, a ſenſe of guilt *hurries* and *diſtracts* the mind, and *darkens* the illuminations of natural reaſon. It creates perplexing, though oftentimes *groundleſs*, ſuſpicions, and alarms with *falſe* terrors. And, accordingly, we find in fact, that *the generality*, in all ages, have been *confuſed* in their arguments about the extent of God's goodneſs, and *uncertain* notwithſtanding the clearneſs and ſtrength of nature's dictates: and have therefore fled, in order to ſupply *deficiencies*, to little trivial *expedients*, that their bewildered imaginations ſuggeſted might be *proper*, and even had recourſe to external penances, *ridiculous* to common ſenſe, to rites of *abominable*, and downright *barbarous*, ſuperſtition.

But let us ſuppoſe, that the world, by the light of reaſon, not only *may* (as has indeed been unanſwerably demonſtrated) but *actually do*, entertain a general notion, that God *is propitious*, they may, notwithſtanding, labour under very uneaſy doubts, about the *extent* of forgiveneſs. For it may perhaps be allowed, by the ſlight thinker, the timerous, the confuſed, and diſtracted guilty, that God will *overlook* little failings, and the more incident infirmities of human nature, but it might not, perhaps, appear ſo plain to them, that he would *pardon* groſs and enormous crimes; or that when perſons have miſpent, and waſted, the greateſt part of their lives in vicious and inordinate purſuits, to the extreme depravation of their own nature, and injury of their fellow-creatures, he will *accept* of a late repentance, in their advanced and declining years. Let it be admitted, that there are ſtrong probable proofs even of this (as I make no doubt there are) upon the foundation of original and unaſſiſted

aſſiſted *reaſon*, if men will give themſelves time to *deliberate*, and *argue ſtrictly* and *calmly* about it; yet conſidering, how prone the generality have always been to *ſuperſtition*, and how naturally a ſenſe of guilt leads to *gloomy* and *diſtruſtful* ideas of GOD, and to repreſent every thing in the moſt *inauſpicious* and *unfavourable* light; it is from hence, I ſay, very unlikely, that the matter would be as *well ſettled*, and *adjuſted* to *general ſatisfaction*, by leaving each individual to the imperfection and anxious confuſion of his own *private reaſon* (or, as it will rather be in innumerable inſtances, to his *paſſions*, his *fears*, his *enſlaving prejudices*) as by a direct and poſitive *revelation*.

ADD to this, that though *reaſon*, unawed and unperverted reaſon, teaches us to expect, without any heſitation, that our *iniquities* will be *forgiven* upon unfeigned *repentance*, yet it can give us very little, if any, aſſurance, that it will be *eternally rewarded*. It may lead us to hope, that we may be placed *in another ſtate of trial*, a ſtate, not attended with ſo many *inconveniencies* and *difficulties* as the preſent; and, that if we finiſh *that courſe* likewiſe, with improvement and ſtronger habits of virtue, we may be advanced to a yet *higher ſtation*; and thus aſcend *gradually*, in the *ſcale*, and towards the *perfection* of moral life: This, I ſay, the light of nature may unqueſtionably dictate to us, and it ſeems to be the *utmoſt length*, that it can, with certainty, carry us. But, that we ſhall be placed in an *indefectible* ſtate of immortal purity and happineſs, ſeems to be quite *beyond* our natural diſcoveries. And theſe circumſtances alone prove, beyond diſpute, the great *uſefulneſs* of the *Chriſtian* revelation, viz. that it is calculated to give *equal ſatisfaction* about *forgiveneſs* of *ſin*, a point of eternal moment, to men of *all* capacities, and of very *unequal* talents for cloſe thinking; that it removes the *obſcurity* and *diſtreſs*, that private

vate reaſon is liable to, through various impediments of its clear and free operation, in particular ſubjects; and not only aſſures us of *pardon*, or *a deliverance* from that *puniſhment*, which our ſins have deſerved, but of an inexpreſſibly glorious and an eternal reward.

AND, now, what a foundation is here laid, for the moſt exalted, fervent, joyful *praiſes*, to the everlaſting *ſource* and *father* of *mercies!* And how can we teſtify our affectionate ſenſe, of the ineſtimable favour which is ſhewn us, by the ſovereign power that rules over univerſal nature, but by endeavouring after a refinement of the temper of our minds, and ſuch a regulation of outward conduct, as is conformable to his excellent example, and righteous precepts! *Gratitude* obliges us to this, and ſo does *intereſt:* and our intereſt, which viſibly appears in it, and is ſo inſeparably connected with the reaſon and fitneſs of the thing itſelf, *ſtrengthens* the *obligations* we are under to gratitude. For, ſurely, we muſt always think, with the utmoſt love and veneration, of that moſt gracious and compaſſionate being, who inſiſts on nothing as *a qualification*, for the forgiveneſs of our numerous and provoking offences, but that we ſincerely endeavour after that *rectitude* of mind, and *pure orderly conduct*, which are unalterably eſſential to the *happineſs* of all intelligent creatures.—*Let the wicked*, therefore, *forſake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the* LORD, who will ſo liberally extend *his mercy* to him, *and to our* GOD, who will thus *abundantly pardon* *. The *diſpleaſure* of our maker includes, in it, the utmoſt diſtreſs and infamy; and his *favour* every thing great, good, and honourable.

* Iſa. lv. 7.

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WE moſt humbly beſeech thee, therefore, O thou common parent of *all intelligent beings*, thou ever gracious and compaſſionate father, and friend, of *mankind*, to inſpire us with a deep unconquerable *horror* of vice, and to *cheriſh* and *eſtabliſh* all our virtuous purpoſes. Let the favourable diſpoſitions of thy providence, and the gentle purifying influences of thy ſpirit, *prevent* our being, ever, *groſsly degenerate* from the *rectitude* and *dignity* of our nature, and *extinguiſhing* our *hope* of immortal glory, by the low indulgencies of ſenſe and appetite. But, if we ſhould *unhappily err* from thy ſacred preſcribed paths of *purity*, from thine immutable laws of *nature* and *providence*, *reſtore* us ſpeedily, *O thou* GOD *of our ſalvation and hope, who art not willing, that any part of thy reaſonable creation ſhould periſh.* Let us not long wander on the *brink* of a moſt rueful and tremendous *precipice*, with miſery and ruin *beneath*. But let us *repent* in any method, that is moſt *proper* and *adapted* to our condition, and, if it be neceſſary, with the bittereſt *agonies* and *horrors* of mind; that we may *reaſſume* our *rank* in the creation, our rank of *honour*, our due ſtation of *happineſs*, and be *favourably regarded* by thee, who art the univerſal, and only, *ſource* of true life and comfort.

CHAP. IX.

Of a Future State *of* Rewards *and* Puniſhments.

BEFORE I enter directly upon the proof of this great point, which is the ſtrongeſt enforcement of all religion and virtue, I ſhall endeavour to ſtate, clearly, the *true ground* of the argument itſelf for a future ſtate; that, the foundation being rightly laid, we may proceed with the greater exactneſs and certainty. And there is the more need of this, becauſe men are too apt to deſtroy, in a great meaſure, the force of their own arguments, by puſhing matters to *extremes*; and, particularly, ſomething of this inconſiſtency too plainly appears, in the reaſonings of mankind concerning the *natural rewards* of virtue, and *puniſhments* of vice, in this life, upon which the chief ſtreſs of the evidence, for a future ſtate, is founded. And, by this means, either the cauſe of *virtue itſelf* is injudiciouſly expoſed, or the *moral evidences* of a ſtate of complete retribution, hereafter, are obſcured and diminiſhed.

THUS we find, that if the point, to be proved, be the *immutable diſtinction* between moral good and evil; if the profeſſed deſign be to evince, and diſplay, the eſſential and intrinſic *excellency* of the former, and *malignity* of the latter; then the reaſoner is apt to expatiate, without a ſufficient guard, on the *preſent rewards* of moral rectitude, and *puniſhments* of ſin and impiety, as if both the one and the other were, in moſt inſtances at leaſt, *real*, *conſtant*, and *unavoidable*. A proper diſtinction is not made between the *tendency* of virtue, and the *actual conſequences* of virtue. Virtue is incautiouſly repreſented, as if it was, *in fact*, its own re-

ward, and vice, as if it was, *in fact*, its own puniſhment. And, by ſuch miſtakes and confuſed miſrepreſentations as theſe, the *true condition* of human life is conſiderably diſguiſed; it has few marks left of its being an *initiatory ſcene*, a ſtate of *probation* and *diſcipline*; and much more of the appearance of a ſtate of *recompence*, and *complete ſcheme of moral government*. 'For the 'more clearly we can trace rewards and puniſhments, *actually* annexed to virtue and vice *here*, it will probably be imagined, that 'there is, in proportion, the *leſs ground* to expect the diſtribution 'of them *hereafter*.'

But there is another error, the oppoſite extreme to what I have now been diſcourſing of, which is more common, and that is *aggravating* the *miſeries* of good men, and deſcribing the circumſtances of virtue and piety as quite *diſconſolate*, and *forlorn*, in *this life*; in order to ſhow, in a ſtronger light, the neceſſity there is of ſuppoſing it *introductory* to *another*. It is going a prodigious length, indeed, even to ſuppoſe, that the pleaſures of virtue and vice are *equal*; and that, if we exclude the conſideration of futurity, the *pious* man has *no advantage* above the *profane*, nor the *benevolent* man above the *malicious* and *cruel*, nor he who carefully *governs* his temper, and enjoys the bleſſing of *cool* and *regular* paſſions, above the diſſolute and uncontrouled *libertine*: This, I ſay, *itſelf* is going a prodigious length. For as virtue and vice are, and muſt be, an *eternal oppoſition* to each other; and, conſequently, as the pleaſures, which immediately flow from ſuch repugnant and inconſiſtent principles, muſt, of neceſſity, be not only of a *diſtinct*, but of a *contrary* kind: from hence it certainly follows, that if the one deſerves to be *purſued*, the other ought, for the ſame reaſon, to be *neglected* and *ſhunned*; if the one be *noble* and *excellent*, the other muſt be *baſe* and *deſpicable*.

OTHERS, therefore, being ſenſible, perhaps, of this error, and yet fearing that the yielding the argument, in point of *natural happineſs*, to the cauſe of *virtue*, will *invalidate* their reaſonings for a future ſtate of retribution, have avoided the *inconſiſtency*, but by increaſing the *abſurdity*—By aſſerting, 'that if the term of man's exiſtence is confined to the *preſent life*, the *virtuous* are *in general*, 'and excepting a few *ſingular* and *eminent* caſes, of all perſons the 'moſt *unhappy*.' A ſtrange poſition, that, one would think, none who had ever known, what it was to *gratify* an irregular paſſion, on the one hand, or who had *taſted* the refined and ſubſtantial pleaſures of virtue, on the other, could be capable of advancing and defending.

FOR if it be true, that moral and religious men, without the hope and expectation of *futurity*, are *more miſerable* than the immoral and impious; and that, not merely in ſome *extraordinary* caſes, but in the *common* and *regular* courſe of human life; if this, I ſay, be true, it can only be on ſuch principles, as will render thoſe, who are devoted to the purſuit of virtue, *more miſerable* than even the *brutes* themſelves: becauſe no other principles can poſſibly juſtify ſo ſtrange an aſſertion, but thoſe which follow—That ſenſual exceſſes, if there be *no life hereafter*, yield a more *manly* and *ſolid happineſs*, than ſubmitting to the reſtraints of reaſon and religion; that a ſecret and ſucceſsful fraud is the ſource of *truer* pleaſure, than a ſtrict adherence to the rules of equity and honour; and a mean degenerate ſelfiſhneſs, than generoſity and univerſal benevolence. And if this, again, be true, it undeniably follows, that the *pleaſures* of *ſenſe*, upon the ſuppoſition that there is no other life, muſt be *preferable* to *intellectual* and *moral* enjoyments; the leſs noble, to thoſe of the more excellent and ſublime part in our compoſition.

poſition. And if ſo, 'ſenſitive gratifications muſt be *always* pre-'ferable to thoſe of a *moral* nature. For if a life of *reaſon* and 'virtue, to *eternity*, be more *eligible* than a life of *ſenſe*, it muſt 'be ſo, *in itſelf*, in *every part* and *period* of our duration; and, 'on the contrary, if a *ſenſitive* happineſs be in *itſelf*, or excepting 'a few *rare extraordinary* inſtances, more *valuable* than a *rational* 'and *moral happineſs*, in *any part* of duration, it muſt, of neceſſity, 'be ſo in *every part* of duration, *i. e.* to *all eternity*.'

Besides, this *injurious* repreſentation of human life not only involves in it all theſe abſurdities, conſidered as a *ſpeculative* error, but is attended with moſt pernicious *conſequences*—it weakens the principal argument, by which we can pretend to *prove*, *ſolidly*, the *difference* of moral good and evil; which argument is, the *natural tendency* of the *former*, at *all times*, to *happineſs*, and of the *latter* to *miſery*. It gives an *unbounded ſcope* to immorality and vice, where men are ſo unhappy, as not to believe *another ſtate* of exiſtence *hereafter*. And, finally, it leſſens even the *argument* for a *future ſtate*, which it is intended to illuſtrate, and diſplay in a ſtronger light.

For it is, principally, from what we *know* of the *nature* of things in *this life*, that we can draw juſt *concluſions*, with reference to their *deſign* upon *the whole*. 'Becauſe virtue, in what we *ſee* 'of it *here*, appears to have a *tendency* to *happineſs*, we fairly pre-'ſume, that it was *originally deſigned* for happineſs. But if we 'had *no proof*, from our experience and obſervation on facts, that 'virtue was appointed to be the *ſource* of human happineſs, or, 'which amounts to much the ſame, that the *ideas* of virtue and 'happineſs have, *in nature*, a *connexion* with each other; we 'ſhould have much leſs reaſon to hope, than we have at preſent,

'that

'.that the Maker of the world *intended* it for *happineſs* in *any ſcene* '.of our exiſtence. And if it was from *itſelf*, and from the *ori-* ' *ginal laws* of the *whole conſtitution*, *more miſerable* than vice ' *here*, I can ſee no clear medium, by which to demonſtrate, that ' it would not *be miſerable for ever.*'

THUS have I ſhewn, how the account, of the *reward* of virtue in *this life*, has been *aggravated*, in order to demonſtrate its intrinſic excellence, and how far it has been *diminiſhed*, together with the *preſent puniſhment* of vice, to heighten the natural evidences of a *future retribution*. But the *true ſtate* of the argument will, I believe, be comprehended under the following heads—FIRST, That virtue, *in general*, *tends* to the *happineſs*, and vice to the *miſery*, of mankind. SECONDLY, That the *happineſs*, ariſing from virtue, is of a *nobler kind*, and more *durable in its nature*, than *any* that can ſpring from ungoverned exceſſes.

FROM whence it plainly follows, in the THIRD place, that *ſo far* as the *natural conſequences*, of virtue and vice, are permitted *actually* to *take place*, the *balance* of *happineſs* will undeniably lie on the ſide of *virtue: ſo far*, I mean, as it reſults *properly*, and *ſolely*, from theſe two different methods of conduct, and is abſtracted from all *extraneous* and *foreign* conſiderations. To this, therefore, I may add by way of corollary, that if we ſuppoſe the *natural advantages* of health, fortune, and the like, to be exactly *equal*, the *pleaſures* of the *good man*, even *here*, may juſtly, upon *the whole*, claim the *pre-eminence.*

BESIDES all this, virtue is undeniably neceſſary to the *good* of *mankind in general*, conſidered as a *community*, a *ſyſtem* of creatures, linked together by *ſocial affections*, and one *univerſal intereſt*; and,

and, conſequently, it muſt tend to advance the happineſs of *every individual*, in his *ſocial* character, which is a very *conſiderable*, and, indeed, a *chief* part of the *preſent* happineſs of man.

So that, in the LAST place, we may fairly lay down this, as the ſum and reſult of the whole, that if there were *no future life*, it would ſtill, in the common and regular courſe of things, be the *intereſt* of *all* mankind to be *virtuous*. And, even in *extreme exigencies*, the caſe is not ſo much *altered*, as may be generally imagined. For if a man ſecures his *eſtate*, or preſerves his *life*, by *ſinful* and *cowardly* compliances, the *ſhame*, of having acted with ſo much meanneſs and diſhonour, may, to an *ingenuous* mind, be more intolerable than *tortures* and *death*. There may be ſuch bitter and ſtinging *remorſe*, where there is *no fear* of *puniſhment*, ariſing from a reflection on the baſeneſs of actions in themſelves, as may render even an *infidel* ſubſtantially and exceſſively *miſerable*. And, in this caſe, I will venture to pronounce, that it would have been his *happineſs* to be inflexibly *honeſt*, though *reproach*, *poverty*, and, even, the *loſs* of *life*, were the certain and unavoidable conſequence.

To what has been hitherto ſaid, it may be proper for me to ſubjoin, in this place, theſe two obſervations. FIRST, That the *evils* and *miſeries*, to which *all* good men are *expoſed*, from the common frailty of human nature, and general imperfection of the world, are ſufficiently *numerous*, to prevent their being *completely happy*; notwithſtanding it be allowed, that the *pleaſures*, reſulting from integrity, are vaſtly *ſuperior* to thoſe *falſe* and *polluted* joys, which are derived from vice and ſenſuality.

AND,

AND, SECONDLY, As virtue, in *this life*, can never, of *itſelf*, conſtitute *perfect* happineſs; ſo there are caſes *ſuppoſeable*, of *intenſe pain* and *ſuffering*, in which, it can hardly be ſuppoſed to render *exiſtence here* below, *upon the whole eligible*; or if barely eligible, no *marks* of the *divine delight* and *complacency* in virtue, nor what would be thought, by any one, a *ſuitable reward* of it. Should it be here ſaid, that, in the moſt *melancholy* and *deplorable* circumſtances that can be imagined, *virtue* will always make a man *more happy*, or, rather, *leſs miſerable* than its *contrary*: I anſwer, that this alone is not ſufficient; but it muſt render him *more happy*, if *no other* recompence be intended, than *vice is*, or ever *will be*, in *any poſſible* circumſtances. For if vice be at any time, upon *the whole*, *more happy* than virtue, the *concluſion*, upon comparing the two caſes together whatever they are, can be no other than this, that 'virtue is *puniſhed*, and vice *rewarded*.'

HAVING thus cleared the way for a proper diſcuſſion of the ſubject, and given a general *ſketch* of the argument for *a future ſtate*, I proceed to treat of it more *at large*—We ſee *here*, *univerſally*, a *plan* of government *propoſed*, but not *perfected*; *general tendencies* to good, but *immature*, and, by various concurring accidents, rendered *abortive*; the *foundation* laid, and a *ſketch* preſented, of a moſt excellent and gracious *ſcheme* for the moral exaltation and happineſs of man, but not *likely*, nor, in the *preſent* conſtitution of things, *poſſible* to be *fully executed*. And this, though *obſtructed*, at preſent, by the intervention of human paſſions and infirmities, and by innumerable other intermingled cauſes (which cannot be hindered from producing their natural effects, without the conſtant exerciſe of a *miraculous* power) we juſtly expect will, one time or other, be brought to *a conſummation*: That this ſentence may not be

be paſſed upon *the whole*, that it was only a *ſpecimen* of what the Creator *might*, of what, judging from his moral character, he *ought* to have done, but *would not* do.

THE proper inference, to be drawn, is moſt certainly the *reverſe* of this, *viz.* that the *principles* of government, *marked* out, and publicly *declared*, in the original frame and order of nature, were intended to be the everlaſting *ſtandard* and *rule*, and the ultimate *ſcope* of the *divine* government; and, of conſequence, we are directly led to the belief and expectation of a *future exiſtence*, in which, *alone*, this great end can be *accompliſhed*; and when, *alone*, it can be made to appear, agreeably to the *model*, firſt expreſſed and fixed in nature, that *virtue* is the *chief happineſs*, and *vice* the *determined* and *ultimate miſery*, of every intelligent being.

THE reaſonings made uſe of, for a *future ſtate*, are drawn from various topics. And in general, or with reſpect to the greater part of them, we can pretend to nothing more, than high *probability*. But when this is *all* that the *nature* of the caſe will admit of, every thinking man will be determined by it in *religion*, as well as in the *common affairs* of life; and it muſt be unreaſonable to the laſt degree, to inſiſt on *demonſtration* and *ſtrict certainty*. The next thing, then, to be ſettled is, what muſt paſs for *probability*; which is the more neceſſary to be conſidered, becauſe mens not fixing the true nature of it, and blending proofs of a different kind, partly *probable*, and partly *demonſtrative*, (even where demonſtration cannot fairly be expected) ſeems to have occaſioned moſt of the obſcurity and confuſion, in their ſpeculations on this ſubject.

THE chief ground of all our arguments, for a *future ſtate*, are the *moral perfections* of GOD; and theſe are, generally, ſuppoſed to be certain *principles*, that reaſon can demonſtrate. Now if this be allowed, I am not at all obliged, when I am only forming a *probable* concluſion, to ſhow that any particular principle is *neceſſarily* inferred from theſe perfections; becauſe, then, it will not be *barely probable*, but *certainly true*: Nor, that the contrary is *abſolutely inconſiſtent* with them; for, if ſo, it will not be *probably*, but *certainly falſe*. All that I am concerned to prove is, that what I maintain is *moſt agreeable* to the *ideas* of *divine* rectitude and goodneſs. And this muſt be allowed to be *probable* evidence, though I cannot reduce the other opinion to a *direct abſurdity*, or, elſe, *probability* will be the ſame with demonſtration.

AGAIN, in our reaſonings about *probability*, we muſt judge upon what *appears* to us; and not *ſuſpend* our belief, becauſe we cannot comprehend *all the circumſtances* of things, or all *the ends*, that an infinitely perfect being may have in his view. For probabilities ſubſiſt in their full *force*, and will *influence* the conduct of every wiſe and conſiderate man, notwithſtanding *poſſibilities* to the contrary. They are, indeed, the *chief ſpring* of human actions, *influence* all the affairs of the world, and *direct* in caſes of the laſt importance, to private perſons, families, and civil ſocieties. And there muſt be allowed to be *a great probability*, in the argument now before us, 'if the notion, of *a future ſtate*, be ſhewn to be '*moſt agreeable* to the *conſtitution* of man, to the *moral attributes* 'of GOD his ſupreme governor, and to the *preſent condition* and '*circumſtances* of human nature.' I beg Leave to add, that whereas I have ſaid, that the reaſonings on this point are, in general, *only probable*, the form of the expreſſion itſelf plainly denotes, and

was intended to denote, that they are not to be *thus* confined, in *every* inſtance without exception: For *ſome* there are, that, if the *being*, and *moral character*, of the firſt ſovereign mind are capable of being *demonſtrated* muſt, I think, riſe to an *equal clearneſs* and *force* of demonſtration. But to enter, directly, upon the argument itſelf.

First, if we conſider the *nature* of *mankind*, we ſhall find, that they are *reaſonable* beings, capable of diſcerning *the difference* between good and evil, and of underſtanding that *particular law*, whatever it be, by which they are to be *governed*, and the weight and importance of the ſeveral *motives*, which urge to the obſervation of it—that they are likewiſe *voluntary agents*, who are neither by their *internal frame*, nor by any *ſuperior impulſe*, neceſſarily determined to virtue or vice; and, conſequently, *moral* and *accountable*, capable of being governed by *laws*, and *rewarded*, or *puniſhed*, for their behaviour.

The next thing to be conſidered, then, is, whether God, their ſupreme governor, has *actually* given them *a law*, by which to direct and regulate their conduct. And, in general, it is highly probable, that there muſt be *ſome law* of *intelligent* natures, as there are in the *animal* and *material world*. And the difference only lies here, that whereas matter is governed by *neceſſary laws*, or, *neceſſarily determined* to produce its effects; rational and free beings are capable of *directing* their *own behaviour*, either in conformity, or oppoſition, to the *law* of their *trial:* which, as I obſerved before, renders them *accountable* for their conduct, and *proper ſubjects* of *reward*, or *puniſhment*.

THE *general law*, which men are under, is in ſhort this—To do whatever is ſuitable to their *intelligent nature*, agreeable to the *relations* in which they are placed, and to their *rank* and *ſtation* in the world; and what will beſt anſwer the *end* of their being, ſo far as it reſpects *themſelves*, or the whole *community* of mankind, of which they are members: And, conſequently, to ſubject all the inferior *appetites* and *paſſions*, to the conduct of *reaſon*, which is the nobler and more perfect principle—to do nothing, but what *becomes* the dignity of their frame, nothing, that will *diſhonour* and *debaſe* it—to practiſe reverence, love, ſubmiſſion, and gratitude to GOD, and imitate his moral character by the exerciſe of juſtice, meekneſs, univerſal benevolence, fidelity, and all other ſocial virtues, on which the order and happineſs of the world depend.—And this I call *a law*, which GOD has given to mankind; becauſe whatever appears to be *a rule*, ariſing from the eſtabliſhed conſtitution of things, with reference to the *actions* of the *creature*, can be no other than *a law*, in the *intention* of the *creator*.

UPON theſe moſt plain and unqueſtionable premiſes, we build our argument thus—The great deſign of GOD, in all his dealings with men, is to promote their *happineſs*. He has given them *laws*, the obſervation of which has not only a certain *tendency* to their happineſs, but is *neceſſary* in order to it. It is, therefore, reaſonable to be ſuppoſed, that he will take the moſt *effectual methods*, to ſecure the *general purpoſe* he has in view, which is the *good* of his creatures. This cannot be obtained, without *a conformity* to the *laws*, which he has given them. Theſe laws will not probably be *obeyed*, unleſs they are *inforced* by the *ſanctions* of ſuitable *rewards*, and *puniſhments*. And, therefore, the *wiſdom* of his government abſolutely requires, that he ſhould make uſe of

theſe,

theſe, ſince they are the moſt *proper means* to anſwer his end. So that *rewards* and *puniſhments* appear to have the *ſame* reaſon, and foundation, with government *itſelf*; viz. to prevent that *moral evil*, which all *good laws* are chiefly intended to *reſtrain*, and which is directly *oppoſite* to, and *inconſiſtent* with, the ſupreme happineſs of mankind.

A *moral government*, therefore, without *laws*, and *laws* without ſufficient enforcing *ſanctions*, being repugnant and contradictory, even to common ſenſe; as much ſo, as a *father* without *children*, or a *governor* without *ſubjects*; it neceſſarily follows, that we have very near as clear evidence of *rewards*, and *puniſhments*, in general, as we can have, that GOD is *the ruler* of the world.—So that the only thing, that remains to be examined, is, whether *ſuch ſanctions*, as the preſent argument requires, are annexed to the divine law *here*: For *if not*, the inference is not barely probable, but neceſſary, that they muſt be introduced, and take place *hereafter*.

AND, if we confine our views to *this world*, the *only ſanctions* of the moral government, and univerſal law, of GOD are—the *rewards*, and *puniſhments*, determined by *civil conſtitutions*; and the *natural conſequences* of virtue, and vice.—As to the appointments, and determinations, of *political laws*, it may be juſtly aſſerted, that there are a vaſt number of *good*, and *bad*, actions, to which they cannot poſſibly be *extended*.—That they enforce only *thoſe virtues*, which are abſolutely neceſſary to *hold ſocieties together*, in an orderly ſtate; and which will be found, upon enquiry, to be the *loweſt* of all the *human* and *moral* virtues.—But greatneſs of mind, generoſity, patience, fortitude, conſidered as *excellencies* of *private character*, they neither *do*, nor *can*, diſtinguiſh: nothing

thing at all, indeed, as it is *dignity* and *perſonal merit* of the man, but, merely, for its *external influence* on the public frame of government, and the peace and order of the world. On the contrary, ingratitude, and ſeveral other vices, that argue the utmoſt *baſeneſs* and *corruption* of nature, *are not puniſhed.*

And as to the *natural rewards*, and *puniſhments*, of moral good and evil, ſo far as they are *uniformly*, and *unalterably*, diſtributed *here*, the *defect* is, in a great meaſure, the ſame—They are frequently *obſtructed* and *evaded*; in all which inſtances, there is, properly ſpeaking, no *reward*, nor *puniſhment*, at all—They are neither ſo *important*, nor ſo *remarkable*, as to *counterbalance* powerful propenſities and temptations to ill; or, if the *common difficulties* in oppoſing paſſion, and habit, not, however, the *unexpected* and *unnatural oppreſſions*, and *perſecutions*, of virtue—*What there is*, of *retribution*, is not *ſeen*; and cannot, therefore, poſſibly anſwer the *ultimate end* of rewards and puniſhments—The greateſt *encouragement*, and *comfort*, of the virtuous ſprings from their *belief*, and *expectation*, of immortality.—And theſe natural conſequences do, generally, *follow* upon *outward acts*; and are not *annexed* to *inward diſpoſitions*, which, alone, conſtitute *perſonal* virtue and vice.

The only *exception* from this remark is, the *approbation* and *cenſure* of the mind upon its own views, and conduct: which, in the *former* caſe, a ſuſpicious, or melancholly, temper, a weak judgment, a gloomy turn to ſuperſtition—and, in the *other*, education, example, cuſtom, a natural preſumption and elatedneſs of heart—will either intirely *obſtruct*, or ſo far *abate*; as that the *good man* ſhall riſe no higher, than barely to the *not condemning* himſelf, and the *ſinner* ſink no lower, than the mean of *neither approving, nor condemning*, by being, with reſpect to all *moral* behaviour, *ſtupid* and *inſenſible.*

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THESE therefore, upon the whole, are very *inadequate ſanctions* of the immutable laws of virtue. A man, who is moſt corrupt in *diſpoſition*, if he be tolerably temperate in *vicious action*, inconſiderate, and poſſeſt of high ſpirits, may almoſt intirely *eſcape* the *puniſhment*; the *moſt depraved*, the far *greater number* of wicked men, in every age of the world, may *eſcape* it. And, on the other hand, the temperate, by a *bad conſtitution*, may be *deprived* of the *advantages* reſulting from *ſobriety*; and the ſtrictly chaſte, and regular, may *ſuffer* the moſt ſevere *evil conſequences* of *incontinence* and *exceſs*. They may *miſs*, through a concurrence of unhappy circumſtances, even of *ſelf-eſteem*, and *ſelf-approbation*, and *live*, and *die*, upon the whole, *more miſerable*, than many of the *vileſt* and moſt *worthleſs* part of mankind.

So that, notwithſtanding the *proviſion* of *leſſer rewards*, and *puniſhments*, in *this life*, yet if they are not *continued*, and *diſpenſed* more *regularly*, and *equitably*, in a *future ſtate*, the *moſt virtuous* men will, oftentimes, be the *leaſt rewarded*, and the *moſt vicious* the *leaſt puniſhed*. Thoſe, who have ſo effectually ſuppreſſed their natural *conſcience* of good and evil, as to be abandoned of all *ſhame*, and *remorſe*, *avoid* the worſt, and moſt dreadful, *puniſhment* of their vices *here*, by being ſenſeleſs and hardened; and are *much leſs* miſerable, if there be *no futurity*, than ſinners of the very *loweſt* degree of guilt, who are ſubject to the anxious horrors of an alarmed and troubled conſcience. And, on the contrary, the *generous ſufferer* for truth, and for the welfare of mankind, is *leſs* rewarded upon the whole, than another of *common*, and far *inferior*, virtue, who has not been expoſed to ſuch vigorous and ſevere trials.

BUT

BUT can theſe things poſſibly be, while there *is a* GOD! a *wiſe*, and *good*, and *all-commanding* GOD! Or, while there is *government*, and *order*, maintained in the univerſe! Do they not neceſſarily lead us to conclude, that as the notion of a DEITY, without a *providence*, is utterly inſignificant, as to all purpoſes of religion and morality; that as a *providence*, with reſpect to mankind, is nothing, without *moral government*; nor *government* without *laws*; nor *laws* without *univerſal*, *certain*, and *viſible ſanctions*; ſanctions *adapted* to the *entire caſe*, i. e. to the capacities, ſituations, difficulties, and weakneſſes of the ſubjects, their reluctance to obedience, their inward, whether natural or acquired, biaſſes, and their external temptations to deviate from the rule of government: nothing of which is *here* fitly and adequately provided for——Is not, I ſay, from hence, this concluſion in a manner forced upon our reaſon, by the irreſiſtible evidence of its truth, that the *future life* is wholly reſerved for the *diſtinction* of moral characters, and for exact and full *retribution*; and *this* a *probationary* ſtate only, intended for *inſtitution* and *diſcipline*, and for the greater *improvement* of mankind? Which muſt, in order to anſwer its principal deſign, be a *promiſcuous ſcene*, upon the whole of *irregular* and *confuſed* appearance, with *indiſtinct*, and *imperfect*, traces of *diſtributive juſtice*: i e. with *ſuch evidence* of wiſdom and juſtice, in the ſupreme governing principle, as will not ſuffer, an attentive and ſerious mind, to neglect the due conſideration of *futurity*; but, at the ſame time, attended with ſuch *defects*, as will, by no means, allow it to terminate its exiſtence, and all its expectations and proſpects, *here*.

So that this account, which I have now given, anſwers, at once, the two great purpoſes—of vindicating the *wiſdom*, *rectitude*, and *honour*

honour of GOD's providence, in the *preſent arrangement* of the *various* ſcenes, and circumſtances of human life—And of making it appear, in the ſtrongeſt light of probability, to be but the *beginning*, the *firſt ſtep* towards a more exalted and perfect being, the *introduction* and *path* to immortality. Otherwiſe, 'how *little*, by 'his vaſtly *precarious tenure* of life, is man *advanced* above the 'flowers of a day, or the *inſects* and *animals* of a few months, or 'years, growth, and *alternate viciſſitudes* of pleaſure and pain? 'What a *trifle* is his *dignity* of nature! How *diminutive* his *impor-* 'tance and *rank* in the creation!'

AND now having ſettled the *true ground* of the whole argument, from *reaſon*, for a future ſtate, by ſhowing what is the *general idea*, which we ought to frame of human life, and the ſum of the *concluſions*, to be fairly drawn, from the preſent conſequences of virtue and vice; and having given, likewiſe, the moſt important and convincing *proofs* of this univerſal, and neceſſary, enforcement of all religion: I proceed to confirm the whole of what has been already offered, by ſeveral *collateral* evidences, which, though not, perhaps, ſtrictly *deciſive* in themſelves, yet, when called in as *auxiliaries* to the main argument, are of unqueſtionable moment and uſe. After which, I ſhall endeavour to eſtabliſh the great principle of the *liberty* of *human actions*; which is the foundation of all *moral character*, and *judicial retribution*.

IF we look abroad into the world, we find honeſty *unſucceſsful*, and *repining*, and fraud *triumphant*; tyranny, violence, and injuſtice *exalted*, and virtue *inſulted*, and *oppreſſed*. We ſee the enemies of GOD, of reaſon, of human nature, *courted*, *flattered*, and almoſt *adored*; and the moſt worthy and amiable part of the human race *thruſt down*, and *trampled upon*, as the baſeſt and moſt

inſignificant part of the creation. And can this be the *ultimate appointment* and conſtitution of the DEITY, if he be poſſeſſed of any degree of wiſdom, of any moral perfection? Can it be his *final determination*, if we ſuppoſe him to be infinitely wiſe, and the conſummate pattern of all moral excellence?

AGAIN, *good* men are by eſtabliſhed laws, and the unfruſtrable ſcope and tendency of nature's operation, *involved* in the *ſame* common ſufferings, and calamities, with the *wicked*; the moſt *exact* and *perfect*, in moral rectitude, with the moſt obſtinately *perverſe* and *degenerate*. And can this, if there be any wiſe order, any ſupreme diſpoſition and government of the univerſe, be the *firſt*, and *laſt*, the *eternal uncorrected* ſtate of mankind? Multitudes are, by their very *birth*, cut off from all *improvements* of reaſon, and, in a manner, abandoned to inevitable *miſery*. Others are deprived of their *natural liberty*, and *ſold* to imperious and cruel tyrants, their equals in degree and rank of being. They are, oftentimes, *ſunk* far below even many mere *irrational* and *animal* creatures, in the *ignominious* employments and offices of their *ſervitude*; and rendered ſo much the more *miſerable*, as their *capacities* and *deſires* were more ſublime, and their original *proſpects*, and *expectations*, of *happineſs* were more enlarged and generous. And this, as it happens, not at all, in *conſequence* of their *good* or *evil* diſpoſitions, can be no part of *moral rule*; but is, intirely, the *unhappy fate* of their nature, a heavy *load* and *burden* impoſed upon them by a ſuperior irreſiſtible power, which many of them would willingly get rid of, if they were aſſured, that no *kinder* method of deliverance was provided, with the *utter loſs of exiſtence*. And if there be no *future ſtate*, can the contriver of ſuch a ſcene of *irregularity* and total *confuſion* of *right* and *wrong*, be a juſt, a good, or even a reaſonable being—While *accidents*, evidently reſulting from *neceſſary*

ceſſary cauſes, prevent the *advantages*, and ſtifle the *pleaſures*, that ought to flow from the *perſonal virtues* of the unhappy ſufferer; and hinder the *inconveniencies*, and *miſeries*, from actually taking place, which are the natural conſequence, and juſt puniſhment, of uncontrouled and preſumptuous wickedneſs. Moſt ſurely, all the eternal principles of *equity*, all wiſe *ends* of *government*, ſtrongly *excite* to the making a *remarkable* and *exact* diſtinction in ſuch caſes as theſe, and even *human juſtice*, and *benevolence*, could hardly be *ſatisfied* without it.

If we ſubjoin, to all this, the vaſtly *large* (and by us, *here*, ſo limited in our exerciſes of reaſon, and unable to form an adequate idea of the utmoſt ſcope of its operations) *inconceivable* capacities of the mind of man; and, at the ſame time, what *little improvement* and *perfection*, it actually attains to; and what innumerable *impediments*, the very conſtitution of nature throws in the way, to its proper *refinement* and *dignity*; this, likewiſe, muſt afford a ſtrong preſumption, that there is *a future exiſtence*, in which the *deſign* of the God of nature may be *perfected*. Becauſe abſolute *goodneſs* prompting, and ſupreme *wiſdom* deſigning, nothing can be imagined to be *created in vain*; or, in other words, nothing can be ſuppoſed ſo *abſurdly* framed, as muſt neceſſarily *defeat*, upon the whole, the *uſe* and *end* of its own implanted powers. I ſhould now finiſh and diſcharge the argument entirely, if I did not think it neceſſary to ſuggeſt a few things, in ſupport of what is, indeed, the *neceſſary foundation* of the whole, and that is, that mankind are *free agents*: For, without the eſtabliſhment of this firſt principle, *government*, *laws*, and *a future judgment* are, in my opinion, inconſiſtent and ſelf-contradictory ideas.

By the *freedom* of all human, *moral*, determinations and actions, I mean—that mankind are neither *determined* to *judge*, *reſolve*, or *act*, by any *foreign conſtraining* and *neceſſitating* power; nor by an *internal impulſe*; nor by any *motives*, preſented to the underſtanding. The notion, indeed, of a *brute* animal impulſe is now, generally, diſcarded, and we are not ſuppoſed to be *mechanically* forced, as material cauſes are to produce their neceſſary effects; but the *compulſion* paſſes under the name of *reaſonable*, and *moral*. We are ſaid to be neceſſarily determined by *motives*; by which, however, the *influence* is allowed to be altogether as *inevitable*, as if it was the effect of pure *mechaniſm*. To clear this argument a little, which has been ſo much darkened, to the confuſion of all *private* moral character, and perplexing all our notions of virtue and vice *in general*; let it be obſerved,

In the First place, that the queſtion---*Whether man is free*--- is not about a point of *abſtract ſpeculation*, but about *a matter of fact*. And thus it ought always to have been treated, and proved in the *ſame way*, as all *other facts* of a *ſimilar* nature; in the *ſame way*, in which we would attempt to prove, that *man was originally endued with reaſon and conſciouſneſs*, or *is a being capable of motion*. The leaving this kind of proof (which alone is juſt and natural) for abſtruſe bewildered *metaphyſics*, which has no ſure principles to proceed upon, has been the principal cauſe of all the embaraſſment, and contrariety of ſentiment, that have appeared upon this ſubject.

The next inquiry is, how *matters of fact*, ſuch as *theſe*, are to be *evidenced*. Now this can only be, by comparing our *experience* of what paſſes within *ourſelves*, with *that* of the *reſt* of mankind;

and by remarking on the general *apprehenſions*, *dictates*, and *concluſions* of human nature. Every man, looking into himſelf, will find, that he is *free* and *ſelf-determining*, as undeniably, as that he has *perception* and *reaſon*. Elſe why does he *upbraid*, and *condemn*, *himſelf* for *immoral* diſpoſitions, ſchemes, and manners, and barely lament, without inward upbraiding and ſelf-condemnation, the *unavoidable* loſs of health, and of fortune, or any other *external* and *accidental* calamity? 'If both are equally *inevitable*, 'both ought to be *reſented alike*; that is, to be *deplored* only as 'misfortunes, but not *cenſured* as *faults*. But, yet, ſo *immoralities* 'univerſally are, and will be: No art, no ſophiſtry, not even eſpouſ-'ing the ſcheme of *fataliſm* itſelf, can prevent it; on the contrary, 'unchoſen *evils* never are, nor ought to be. And this muſt be a 'demonſtration, that it was *in our power* to have *prevented* the 'one, but *not* the other; or, elſe, human nature will appear to be 'a *wild*, *arbitrary*, and *inconſiſtent* frame.'

AGAIN, if mankind were *neceſſarily determined* to act, by *motives*, or by any *other cauſe*, there muſt be a greater *apparent uniformity*, in the general courſe of their actions, than is to be diſcerned at preſent; and the *capriciouſneſs*, and undeterminable *variety*, of their behaviour cannot, otherwiſe, be *accounted for*, than from an *abſolute freedom* of *choice*, and *voluntary reſolution*. 'The *exter-'nal ſtate* of the world is juſt, *what it might be expected to be*, if 'men were really *free agents*; but quite an *intricate* and *inexpli-'cable* ſcene (with their *powers*, and *circumſtances*, ſo much upon 'a *level*, and the *ſame motives neceſſarily operating*) as their deter-'minations and manners are ſo intirely *diſcordant*, and *contrary* to 'each other.'

BESIDES,

BESIDES, 'there is *no one particular motive*, that can be ſup-
'poſed to influence *neceſſarily*, becauſe we know, that they are *all*,
'in their turn, *oppoſed* and *over-ruled*; and to imagine, that *mo-*
'*tives*, in *general*, have a *neceſſitating* force, when it is demon-
'ſtrable, that they have, at different times, been *complied with*,
'and *rejected*, by the ſame *perſons*, and had *various effects* on in-
'dividuals, in the *ſame ſituation*, and, as far as we can judge from
'the moſt exact obſervation, with the *ſame temperament* of body,
'and *faculties* of mind—This, I ſay, is rejecting probabilities,
'built on experience, for conceited and groundleſs preſumptions.'

IF it be ſaid, that the *motive*, which *actually* determines, *neceſ-*
ſarily determines; and that it is pretended of *no other*, this may have a very fallacious and deluſive meaning. It may only ſignify, that what is *once acted*, in conſequence of a final reſolution of the mind, *cannot but be*; i. e. when *it really is*, it *cannot but be*. 'But
'though the *act*, when it *is*, cannot but *be*, and the *determination*,
'when it is *made*, cannot but be *made*; and to aſſert the contrary,
'would be the ſame as to affirm, that *it is*, and *is not*, at the
'ſame time: yet it by no means follows, that the *motive*, ulti-
'mately complied with, *neceſſarily* cauſed it *to be as it is*; or that
'it *might not have been*, like innumerable *other motives*, which are
'preſented to the mind, quite *ineffectual*.'

BUT to prove, further, that men are not neceſſarily determined by *motives*, I beg leave to add another remark, *viz.* that they ſometimes act, or *may* at leaſt act, without *any determinate motive* at all. Thus, for example, if *two* things which occur to our thoughts, in order to the executing any particular ſcheme, are exactly *equal*, or, in our *opinion*, equal; if we prefer *either*, though there

there was a *general motive* to *act*, there can be no *ſpecial motive* to the act, itſelf, of *preference*. And this, I take to be a ſhort and clear confutation of the ſcheme of *fataliſm*; 'becauſe whatever be-'ing can, *in any inſtance*, *act without a motive*, cannot be *always*, 'and *neceſſarily*, determined by *motives*.'

THUS have I finiſhed, what I intended to offer, concerning the *natural evidences* of a future ſtate. And it would be mere trifling with the reader's time and patience, to attempt to prove, that the *goſpel* of *Chriſt*, herein, ſtrictly concurs with the ſentiments and dictates of *reaſon*; ſince its whole doctrine is evidently founded upon, and throughout connected with, this eſſential principle of religion. It will be much more uſeful for me, to conclude this chapter, with a ſhort account of the general nature of future *rewards* and *puniſhments*, collected from the writings of the new teſtament.—And to begin with the reward of pious and virtuous men hereafter—It is deſcribed to us as the perfection of *intellectual*, *moral*, *ſocial*, life, and as adapted to the *active* and *improveable* nature of the mind of man. I ſhall treat of it diſtinctly, under each of theſe four heads.

IN the FIRST place, the *chriſtian* revelation directs us to conſider it as the *perfection* of *intellectual life*, ſuited to, and glorioufly exalting, thoſe internal rational faculties, by means of which our nature appears cloathed with ſuch conſpicuous *dignity* above that of mere *animal* creatures—The reaſon of mankind even in the preſent ſtate, limited and imperfect as it is, is capable of making very conſiderable diſcoveries. It can furniſh us with a great deal of uſeful knowledge, with reſpect to GOD the author of the univerſe, to the wonders and curioſities of nature, and the general ſcheme and operations of providence. But notwithſtanding all that may be ſaid

in favour of its *natural* ſtrength and excellence, and the *extraordinary* improvements of it in ſome particular minds, of a more elevated genius and unwearied application, it muſt be owned, in general, to be but obſcure and confuſed in points of high importance, where more clear, diſtinct, and adequate conceptions of things are extremely deſirable. The *animal part* of our conſtitution is a clog and an incumberance upon the mind; *carnal paſſions* darken it, and obſtruct its operations; *prejudices of education* pervert it; *popular opinions* enſlave it; *objects of ſenſe*, and *trifling amuſements*, engroſs our attention, and the cares of life diſtract us. And to inſtance, particularly in our knowledge of GOD, how lame and defective is it! How divided, inconſiſtent, and childiſh, are the ſentiments of mankind even about the ſupreme and infinite being, the object of their adoration, and the ſpring of their happineſs! The greateſt maſters of reaſon are perplexed in their notions of his *ſelf-exiſtence* and *immenſity*, and loſe themſelves in metaphyſical ſubtleties, and blind diſputes. Others being guided by tradition, or wild through enthuſiaſm, or forming their ideas of the all-perfect Being, by their own paſſions and prejudices, entertain wrong conceptions even of his *moral character*; imagining him to be a capricious arbitrary ſovereign, a partial, ſtern, inexorable judge: and by ſuch dark and g'oomy fancies they not only derogate from his abſolute perfection, but torment themſelves with ſuperſtitious fears, deſtructive of the peace and comfort of their minds.

BUT in the *future life*, the ſenſitive nature being purged and refined, we muſt, of conſequence, be much better diſpoſed for *intellectual* purſuits; and it may be juſtly ſuppoſed, that even the *reaſoning faculty* itſelf will be *enlarged* and *ſtrengthened*.—And what a vaſt privilege muſt it be to have the underſtanding always *clear* and *vigorous*, and the deciſions of reaſon that are now ſlow and laborious,

rious, and built, oftentimes, on groundleſs preſumptions and conjectures, *eaſy*, *quick*, and *certain*; to be eſtabliſhed in true and worthy apprehenſions of GOD, without that *confuſion* which attends our preſent inquiries, or any mixtures of *dangerous error*; and diſcern diſtinctly, in proportion to the capacity of our finite, though perfected, nature, the conſummate and moſt amiable beauties of his moral character?---What *inexpreſſible* pleaſure muſt it be to be able to account for many *myſteries* in providence, which now offend and puzzle human reaſon; to ſee how the *ſeeming irregularities* of the creation all conſpire to anſwer ſome grand deſign; and that what appears *intricate* and *evil* to our contracted underſtandings, to our preſumption and ſelf-conceit, is, upon the whole, perfectly harmonious and well ordered, and a demonſtration of the boundleſs wiſdom, and ſupremely adoreable goodneſs, of the Maker and Governor of the world?---What *exalted* delight muſt it yield to contemplate the works of GOD in their immenſity, variety, inimitable *ſtructure*, admirable *uſes*, and their *ſubſerviency*, even in the *minuteſt* parts, to the regularity and order of the whole natural *ſyſtem*, and the general good of the *moral* world? An examination of the *works* of *nature*, all, who have any experience that way, will allow to be a moſt agreeable employment; and the farther we carry our inquiries, every *different object* affording new matter of wonder and curioſity, the more highly we are entertained: How then ſhall we be tranſported, when nature, in its inmoſt receſſes, is more thoroughly expoſed to our view, and we diſcover innumerable beauties, innumerable ſtrokes of exquiſite divine workmanſhip, which are beyond the *reach* of our *preſent faculties*? The ſight of a *new country*, of a *new face* and *ſcene* of things, is apt to give us very pleaſing ſenſations: what then muſt we feel when we ſurvey *new worlds*, each particularly fitted to receive and ſupport the race of creatures that inhabit it; all the *intelligent* ſubject to one

univerſal law of reaſon; and where there are any *mere animals*, theſe actuated by inſtincts, ſuited to their peculiar conſtitution and circumſtance?—The very imagination repreſents to our thoughts an idea of pleaſure, ariſing from a conjunction of objects *new*, *great*, and *beautiful*, from an admiration, reverence, and love of our Maker, on tracing the footſteps of his wiſdom, power and goodneſs, as is not to be deſcribed; a pleaſure, that, in the proſpect of it, fills and *enlarges* the mind, and gives it conſciouſneſs of its high *original*, and ſuperior dignity.

Now that this *more perfect knowledge* of the frame of nature, and the conduct and operations of providence, and, conſequently, of the Author and Governor of univerſal nature, is one part of the happineſs of the upright in the *future ſtate*, may very fairly be preſumed, becauſe it is the nobleſt exerciſe of *reaſon*, and one of the moſt ſuitable branches of happineſs that an *intelligent* creature can enjoy: and, beſides, it is ſtrongly intimated in theſe words of *St. Paul*----*Now we ſee through a glaſs darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then ſhall I know even as I alſo am known* *. For though he who formed the mind of man muſt always have an eaſy *acceſs* to it, and can communicate, *immediately*, all that knowledge of his perfections, which we are capable of attaining to by our own application and ſtudy of his works; yet, that it ſhould be acquired, at leaſt in a great meaſure, in the natural way, which is the proper *employment* and higheſt *improvement* of our rational powers, is moſt conformable to the methods of his providence in *all other* caſes: and ſuch knowledge being more ſtrictly *our own*, of native growth and culture, and, of conſequence, more praiſe-worthy and honourable, muſt, of neceſſity, yield us greater ſatisfaction, than if we received it paſſively by a ſupernatu-

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* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

ral revelation. I ſhall only add, that the knowledge I have been ſpeaking of, as conſtituting one branch of our future felicity, will not be matter of mere *amuſement*, of mere ſurpriſing and delightful *ſpeculation*, but attended with the moſt ſubſtantial advantages; as it will conſtantly maintain in us ſuch a reverence of GOD, ſuch an eſteem of, and delight in, him as the original, and grand exemplar of all moral excellence, as will effectually engage us to the love of virtue and univerſal goodneſs, and to aſpire after the higheſt degrees of it, in imitation of his perfect character. Which leads me,

SECONDLY, To take a ſhort view of the future reward of good men, as it is the *perfection* not of intellectual only, but alſo of *moral life*. Thus conſidered, it riſes as much, in reſpect of real inherent worth, above *intellectual* perfection ſimply and abſtractedly conſidered, as *rectitude of temper* is more honourable in itſelf, and the ſource of more ſolid happineſs, than mere *exactneſs of judgment*, and juſt ſpeculation.—Poſitive duties indeed, which are ſuited to the weakneſs and imperfection of the *preſent ſtate*, will hereafter ceaſe of courſe, becauſe the reaſons of their inſtitution will be intirely ſuperſeded: but works of *moral* and *intrinſic righteouſneſs* are of immutable obligation, and muſt, *for ever*, be the chief rectitude and glory, and the ſupreme ſatisfaction of all reaſonable beings. Accordingly, St. *Paul* * informs us, that *charity never faileth*; and the ſame, by a parity of reaſon, muſt hold true as to all other *moral qualities*, which are equally founded on the *unalterable* nature of things. But there is this comfortable difference in the ſtate of the *faithful*, when inveſted with *immortality*, from what it is at preſent, that all their virtues will be more pure and refined, their love to GOD more ardent and uninterrupted, their zeal and devotion more unmechanical and rational, and at the ſame

* 1 Cor. xiii. 8.

time more lively and tranſporting, and their benevolence to their fellow-creatures more ſublime, ſtrong, and extenſive. They will then feel none of theſe mixtures of weakneſs, and of irregular and ſinful affections, which now corrupt and deprave their beſt ſervices, and retard their progreſs towards *perfection*.—And, ſurely, this muſt give us a very exalted idea of their happineſs, if our minds are not ſtrangely perverted by *prejudice*, or debaſed by *ſenſuality*. For the pleaſures of a *pure* and *regular* nature are as much preferable to the enjoyments of ſenſe, and the gratifications of a wanton diſtempered *appetite*, as the *ſoul* is ſuperior to the *body*, *reaſon* to *paſſion*, and the life of *a man* to that of *a brute*: nay, they are of the *ſame kind* with thoſe of the ever-bleſſed GOD himſelf, and all intelligent ſpirits above us. And if the exerciſe of true goodneſs, though attended with many defects, yields the *ſincereſt* delight we are capable of in this life; how vaſtly muſt our *ſatisfaction* be *improved*, when our virtue is unalloyed and perfect, and we are thoroughly conformed, according to the capacity and degree of our nature, to the moral excellencies of the infinite being?

To what has been already ſaid, we may add

IN the THIRD place, that the happineſs of the future ſtate, is the *perfection*, likewiſe, of *ſocial life*. Man is evidently formed for ſociety, and endued with particular affections and inſtincts, which ſtrongly prompt and direct him to it. So that, as he is now conſtituted, was he a *ſolitary*, he muſt, of courſe, be a *miſerable* being, and the moſt warm and vigorous principles and tendencies in his nature would be rendered quite uſeleſs. Upon which account we have the utmoſt reaſon to conclude, that the future immortal glory of the faithful will be enjoyed in ſociety; ſince there is no more certain rule than the nature of things, by

which to judge of the deſign of the great Creator in forming them. Beſides, this groſs abſurdity follows upon admitting the contrary ſcheme, *viz.* that we ſhall be deprived, in the moſt *perfect* ſcene of our exiſtence, of the pleaſures of benevolence and friendſhip, the moſt *generous* and *refined* of all our pleaſures.

INDEED the happineſs of *ſociety* depends, in a great meaſure, on the principles and diſpoſitions of thoſe with whom we converſe, and is, in the preſent life, frequently interrupted by ſelfiſhneſs and pride, peeviſhneſs and ill-nature, by the gloomineſs and reſerved temper of ſome, and the unguarded freedoms of others; by inſolence on the one hand, and too quick a reſentment on the oppoſite ſide; by a variety of little accidents, and a multiplicity of turbulent and unfriendly paſſions. Friendſhips are haſtily contracted, and as abruptly diſſolved; fancy and prejudice are, in numberleſs inſtances, the only directors both of our affection and diſlike; and an imaginary affront ſhall controul every ſoft impreſſion of humanity, and cancel all the obligations of juſtice and gratitude. Thus are we ourſelves the authors of our own miſery; and for the ſake of indulging a ſingular humour, an irregular appetite, an ambitious purpoſe, or the tranſports of an impetuous and unenlightened *zeal*, will not ſuffer human life to be ſo eaſy and agreeable a ſituation as the gracious author of nature deſigned it to be. But if we made *one ſociety* with all the *wiſe* and *good* that have lived from the beginning of the world, men of the moſt ſublime views, the moſt amiable and generous diſpoſitions, the moſt exact and confirmed virtue; if we were joined in *ſociety* with perſons of the moſt exalted underſtandings, and the greateſt compaſs of ſubſtantial and uſeful knowledge; with *none* but ſuch as reſembled GOD in purity, truth, and righteouſneſs; with *none* but mild and benevolent ſpirits, who delighted in the happineſs of each other; if, as an addi-

tion

tion to all this, we were admitted to *converſe* with ſuperior *intelligences*, and had the advantage of their larger improvements both to aſſiſt our reaſon, and exalt our morals: Could we imagine any thing more *deſireable?* Would it not be the very *perfection* of ſocial happineſs?---But *thus* it will be, when we ſhall be united hereafter according to the expreſs doctrine of the chriſtian religion, to the glorious and triumphant aſſembly of *the ſpirits of the juſt made perfect, to an innumerable company of angels, to Jeſus the mediator of the new covenant, and to* God *the* Creator, Lord, and *Judge* of all*, the inexhauſtible ſource of light, life, and bleſſedneſs. Nothing indeed ſo greatly inhances the value of this perfect *eternal* life, as this laſt conſideration, that it will be enjoyed amidſt the *brighteſt diſplays* of God's more immediate preſence, under his *peculiar* ſuperintending care, and the influences of his *ſpecial* favour. For from hence we are aſſured, that it will not be ſubject to *interruption* or *decay*, and that it cannot be in the power of any *malevolent* beings, who may repine at our happineſs, to *deprive* us of it. And, perhaps, the gracious author of this conſummate felicity may communicate to the mind pleaſures of various kinds, beſides what directly reſult from the *perfection* of its *natural faculties*. For as he framed, and muſt, of conſequence, be intimately and thoroughly acquainted with *human nature*, he can certainly affect it with pleaſure or pain, by an infinite variety of methods, to us incomprehenſible. And from ſuch a pure, harmonious, and happy ſociety as has been above deſcribed, over which God himſelf is pleaſed graciouſly to *preſide*, all uneaſy doubts, all inward darkneſs and terror, all the dreadful effects of envy, revenge, and ſenſual extravagance, together with cenſoriouſneſs and unfriendly jealouſies, with the oppreſſion of tyrants, and the cruel rage of relentleſs perſecutors, muſt be for ever baniſhed.

This,

* Heb. xii. 22, 23, 24.

THIS, which has been given, is a ſhort *ſketch* of the *perfect life* of the *ſpirit*, the nobler and divine principle in man, in its future ſtate of exalted and tranſcendent dignity.—The chriſtian religion aſſures us further, that the *body* will be reunited to it, in order to extend and complete its happineſs. But whereas it is now a *feeble* and *decaying* frame, and has in it innumerable ſeeds and principles of corruption and death; it will be raiſed an *incorruptible* ſubſtance, and flouriſh in *immortal* ſtrength and vigour. Whereas the weight of the *ſenſitive* part of our compoſition oppreſſes the *rational* nature, and oftentimes overſpreads the mind with *confuſed* and *melancholy* terrors; it will hereafter be refined from all *groſs* and *diſturbing* paſſions, and adapted to the improveable and active nature of its animating ſpirit. And, finally, whereas the preſent body is conſtituted of *vile* and *coarſe* materials, and frequently polluted and waſted by diſtempers, which deface its *beauty* and *majeſty*; at the reſurrection it will aſſume ſuch a *glorious* form, as will render ſtrict piety and perſevering *patient* virtue highly illuſtrious in the ſight of angels and men: then, as our bleſſed Saviour expreſſes it, *ſhall the righteous ſhine forth as the ſun in the kingdom of their father* *—They ſhall be crowned with honours inexpreſſibly ſuperior to the utmoſt pomp and magnificence of all mortal glories, advanced to a higher rank and order, in the intelligent and moral creation, than the *preſent* condition of human nature can poſſibly admit of, and be made like unto *the angels of* GOD *in heaven* †. They ſhall bear a part in the *employment* and *felicity* of angels, and reſemble them in their *holineſs*, and *immortality*.

SHOULD it be thought a little improbable, that the very *next ſtep* from human life, *depreſſed* as it now is, will be an elevation of

* Matth. xxii. 30. † Chap. xiii. 43.

of holy and inflexibly upright ſpirits to ſuch an *eminent* dignity, and to a *fixed unalterable* ſtate of moral perfection and happineſs, I deſire it may be conſidered, that though this ſeems to be *beyond* the *natural* intimations and diſcoveries of our *reaſon*, yet when it is propoſed to us, as it is in goſpel *promiſes*, upon the authority of a revelation clearly and ſtrongly atteſted, *reaſon* can make no *material objection* to deſtroy or invalidate this evidence. For nothing can be more agreeable to our *wiſeſt* apprehenſions of GOD's perfections and government, than that the rewards which he is pleaſed to confer ſhould exceed the ſervices of his creatures, and bear ſome proportion to his own *boundleſs munificence*. Nothing is more worthy the infinite Creator and *Father* of all, than to advance to moſt *diſtinguiſhed glory* his humble and obedient *children*, in order to *diſplay his own* ſupreme and abſolute moral rectitude, and his complacency and delight in *their* virtues.—And, perhaps, as mankind, in their *preſent* ſituation, are expoſed to ſuch a variety of unhappy prejudices, and obliged to controul the influence of ſuch ſtrong paſſions; as they are liable to be corrupted, to a very great degree, from a wrong education and the force of evil examples, and even to contract, from theſe cauſes, vitious habits, before they arrive to a ſufficient maturity and ſtrength of underſtanding to *diſcern* and *repel* the contagion; as they are ſurrounded with ſnares and dangers in more advanced life, forced to encounter with powerful temptations to vice, and ſtruggle with many diſcouragements, and oppreſſing difficulties, in order to preſerve a clear and untainted integrity: upon *theſe* accounts, perhaps, it may be, that the wiſdom of GOD has ordained—that their reward hereafter ſhall be ſo remarkably great, and attended with this pleaſing circumſtance in particular, 'that their *virtue* and happineſs ſhall not be ſubject to '*any future hazard*.'—That there is *any other* race of intelligent creatures in the univerſe, who labour under the ſame diſadvantages,

tages, and are clogged with equal difficulties as *mankind* moſt certainly are, we cannot pretend to ſay. One thing we are plainly told in the chriſtian revelation, *viz.* that this was not the original condition of human nature.

HOWEVER, I offer this only as a *plauſible* account (which the light of nature does not oppoſe) of that ſupreme inſtance of the grace of the goſpel, the *promiſe* made to all the perſevering faithful, that in the future glorious world, to which they ſo ardently aſpire, they ſhall *ſin*, and *ſuffer*, and *die* no more *, but be *confirmed* in the perfection of their nature, and in the enjoyment of immortality, and of bliſs unutterable.

As to the account, which the *Chriſtian revelation* gives, of the *future puniſhments*, which are appointed by GOD, the ſupreme governor and judge of mankind, for obſtinate vice and impenitence, I ſhall, at preſent, ſay but little. Only, in general, it is neceſſary for me to remark, that as it *ought to be*, ſo it *really is*, intirely conſonant to the dictates of right reaſon. Theſe puniſhments, I have before ſuppoſed, to have a *medicinal* deſign, to correct the moral diſorders of men; and, conſequently, that they have not their foundation in *anger*, nor in any thing like a deſire of *revenge*, but in the *wiſdom* of the DEITY; becauſe they are proper to check the growth of vice, and maintain the authority of his laws and government. And from hence it ſeems plainly to follow, that they muſt be of ſuch a *nature* and *degree*, as, it may reaſonably be expected, will *counterbalance*, in ſome meaſure, the ſtrength of the animal paſſions, and the weight of worldly temptations. And as theſe temptations have a very powerful influence, and irregular paſſions

* Luke xx. 36.

are violent and impetuous (eſpecially in thoſe, who have ſuffered themſelves to be ſo far corrupted, as to contract vicious habits) that can be nothing *leſs*, than ſome puniſhment that is very great and important; and adapted to ſtrike the mind with *dread* and *terror*, at the apprehenſion of it. Puniſhments loſe much of their weight, by being *unſeen* and *future*; and, therefore, if that, which is annexed to a wilful and preſumptuous violation of the laws of GOD, were ſomething ſmall and trifling, this, together with the ſcene of it being at a diſtance, and what we have no direct notion of, would quite deſtroy the *impreſſion*, that all wiſe puniſhments are deſigned to have upon the mind, for the reformation of the offender: and, conſequently, the *wiſdom* of GOD, and his *goodneſs* too (which muſt be greatly concerned in an event, that is ſo eſſential to the happineſs of the moral world) muſt diſpoſe him to appoint puniſhment, for perverſe and untractable wickedneſs, ſo terrible and ſhocking to the imagination, as may be ſufficient to convince men of the *folly* and *madneſs* of it, under its moſt deluding appearances, and ſurrounded with all its moſt deſired and applauded advantages.

AND, agreeably hereto, and moſt wiſely, the *chriſtian doctrine* repreſents the puniſhments of the life to come by ſuch *images*, as have a natural tendency, by ſtrongly alarming our fears, to make us relinquiſh all our vices with the utmoſt *averſion*, and engage *ſeriouſly* in a virtuous courſe. Some of theſe deſcriptions are plainly *figurative*; but others, I apprehend, are more *ſtrict* and *literal*; particularly that of *everlaſting deſtruction, from the preſence of the* LORD, *and from the glory of his power* *. And this muſt, at leaſt, include in it, beſides remorſe of conſcience, bitter reflections on our folly and guilt, and other natural evil conſequences of vice—

the

* 2 Theſſ. i. 9.

the *loſs* of GOD's favour; *baniſhment* from the manſions of the bleſſed; and the being *deprived* of the moſt exalted honours, and felicities, of human nature; which, if any man can contemplate without horror, he muſt be of a *ſtrange* make of mind indeed, loſt to every ſentiment of reaſon, and hardened againſt all ſenſe of intereſt.

The CONCLUSION.

AND now, having, I hope, fully proved, under the ſeveral preceding heads of diſcourſe, that the *chriſtian religion* gives us the moſt worthy and ſublime notions of the DEITY; I ſhall endeavour to ſhew further, (as a new, *intrinſic* mark, of its divinity and uſefulneſs) that the ſentiments, which it inſpires, are not only perfectly conformable to the dictates of right reaſon, but were particularly *adapted* to rectify the ſuperſtitions, and prejudices, and depraved ſentiments of mankind, at the time of our Saviour's appearance.——'Tis well known, how wofully, and almoſt univerſally, corrupted the *Gentile* world were, and how over-run with *polytheiſm* and *idolatry*. This was the caſe, not only in countries barbarous and uncultivated, and ſtrangers to philoſophy and the liberal ſciences, but in the more refined nations of *Greece* and *Rome*, which were renowned for learning and politeneſs. Even at *Athens*, where the antient philoſophy was improved to its higheſt pitch, there was an *altar* publickly erected to *the unknown* GOD *. And St. *Paul*'s deſcription, of the idolatry of the *heathens*, is exactly agreeable to the accounts we have, in all other authentic and credible hiſtories; *viz. that when they knew* GOD [or might have been led, to the right knowledge of him, by his works of nature] *they glorified him not as* GOD—*but became vain in their imaginations—profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they became fools: and changed the glory of the incorruptible* GOD, *into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beaſts, and creeping things.*

* Acts xvii. 23.

things [a]. They *did ſervice unto them*, that *by nature* were *no gods* [b], [or to mere imaginary beings, that had no real exiſtence] and were *alienated from the life of* God, *through the ignorance that* was *in them, becauſe of the blindneſs of their hearts* [c].

There were, indeed, a few, who, by the ſtrength of their *ſuperior genius*, ſaw through the ſtupidity of the general ſuperſtition, and ſeem, in their private opinions, to have held but one Supreme author and governor of the univerſe; but they either thought it *in vain*, or elſe had not *courage* enough, to oppoſe the vulgar prejudices: ſo that there was ſcarce any thing done, or *likely* to be done, in this ſtate of things, towards a *reformation* of this groſs corruption. —Now in circumſtances ſo depraved, nothing could be more *expedient*, or more *ſuitable* to the *neceſſities* of mankind, than a revelation from heaven, to teach them the knowledge and worſhip of the *one true* God, from which they had ſo ſhamefully revolted. And, therefore, to accompliſh this great end, *Chriſt* was ſent into the world: and the *unity* of God, the firſt dictate of natural religion is, likewiſe, the *fundamental principle* of his divine doctrine.—*This is life eternal* (ſays he in his prayer to the *Supreme father* and God of the univerſe) to *know thee the only true* God [d]. And the language of his apoſtles was conſtantly in the ſame ſtrain——*We preach unto you, that ye ſhould turn from theſe vanities unto the living* God [e] —*who made the world, and all things therein—and hath made of one blood, all nations of men, to dwell upon all the face of the earth* [f].

But, farther, as the *heathens* erred greatly concerning the *unity*, ſo likewiſe in their notions of the *nature*, of God. The ſenti-

[a] Rom. i. 21, 22, 23. [b] Gal. iv. 8. [c] Epheſ. iv. 18. [d] John xvii. 3. [e] Acts xiv. 15. [f] Acts xvii. 24. 26.

ſentiments, generally entertained concerning their *deities*, were extremely abſurd and irrational; and the aids of philoſophy were either not *applied* to the *cure* of this diſorder, or proved *fruitleſs* and *ineffectual*. At this *critical ſeaſon*, when ſo great a part of his rational creation was loſt in darkneſs and confuſion, amidſt a multiplicity of *ſtrange* and *fictitious* objects of worſhip, the father of mercies graciouſly condeſcended to *interpoſe*; and, by his only begotten Son, not only inſtructed them in the *exiſtence* of *one* eternal and infinite mind, the author and governor of all things, but communicated juſt and worthy apprehenſions of his *attributes*; and rectified the numerous errors that were ſo widely *diſperſed*, and had ſo long *prevailed*, to the diſhonour of his *own perfections*, and the reproach of *human nature*. For whereas it was a part of the *eſtabliſhed* and *vulgar* ſuperſtition, that the *gods* frequently aſſumed a *corporeal* ſubſtance, and that their *preſence* and *favourable influence* were, in a great meaſure, confined to their *temples*; the religion of our bleſſed Saviour informs us, that the *true* GOD is in every place *alike*, and ſupports and animates all his creatures, by his *univerſal efficacious providence*—That the LORD *of heaven and earth dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he worſhipped with mens hands, as though he needed any thing, ſeeing he giveth to all life and breath, and all things*—That *he is not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being*—That *as we are* all *the offſpring of* GOD, *we ought not to think, that the Godhead* (from whence we derive all our *intelligence* and *activity*, and which muſt, therefore, be *itſelf* poſſeſſed of infinitely higher degrees of *wiſdom* and *power*) *is like unto gold, or ſilver, or ſtone, graven by art and man's device* *.

AGAIN,

* Acts xvii. 24, 25, 27, 28, 29.

AGAIN, the *Gentiles* attributed to their *gods*, not only natural *weakneſſes* and *imperfections*, but the moſt infamous *enormities*, wars and thefts, rapine and murder, jealouſy and revenge; by which their *own minds* muſt be vitiated and debauched to a great degree, and prepared for all manner of vice and licentiouſneſs. But the chriſtian doctrine, concerning the Supreme being, is, that he is a ſpotleſs example of all *moral excellence*; abſolutely juſt and faithful, benevolent and merciful.—Nor, by the accounts given in the new teſtament, are there are any *miniſters attending* on his glorious throne, or honoured by him, the great monarch of the world, with offices either of *truſt*, or *government*, but, who are alſo moſt *pure*, *refined*, *benevolent* ſpirits, *perfect* in *goodneſs*, within the degree and limit of their nature.

AND whereas the *heathens* ſeem to have conceived of their *deities*, as *cruel* and *inexorable*, and not to be prevailed upon to receive *prayers*, or ſhew any *mercy* to degenerate creatures, till their *vengeance* was fully *glutted* with the blood of *ſacrifices* (which ran to ſuch a height of barbarity in ſome places, as to be a no leſs precious offering, than the blood of *men*, particularly of *ſlaves* and *captives* taken in war) our Saviour has repreſented the Divine Being, under the moſt ſhining and perfect characters of goodneſs and mercy; *kind unto the unthankful, and the evil*; and infers, from thence, the obligation we are under to practiſe the moſt generous of all virtues, love and good will to our *enemies* *. The goſpel ſpeaks of the *ſacrifice* of *Chriſt*, only as *the way* in which GOD choſe, for wiſe reaſons, to *diſpenſe* his mercy; and not as the *argument*, or *motive*, inducing him to be merciful: on the contrary, it lays

* Luke vi. 35.

down this as the fundamental point of all religion (and, conſequently, as a principle, which natural reaſon might have argued with great *probability*) that *he is* the *rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him**; and ſuppoſes, that the goodneſs which he has diſplayed, in the general conſtitution of things and courſe of providence, was a rational *encouragement* to the *Gentile* world, to ſerve and worſhip him, with hopes of acceptance and favour. And particular care is taken, in the whole new teſtament, to aſcribe the *mediation* of *Chriſt* intirely to the *love* of GOD; to his free, unconſtrained, nay unſolicited *goodneſs*. He is deſcribed as the original *contriver* and *author* of our redemption, prompted by nothing, but his eſſential unchangeable *benevolence*; and *Chriſt* as having acted only by his *direction*, and according to the *plan*, which his infinite wiſdom had formed. So that it is not more plainly, nor ſo frequently, inculcated, that we are bound *thankfully* to acknowlege the *condeſcenſion* of our bleſſed *Saviour*, in the part he ſuſtained, as that our *ultimate* obligations of *love* and *gratitude* are to GOD, *the father*, the GOD of *grace and conſolation*; *who hath bleſſed us with all ſpiritual bleſſings* through him †. Upon the whole, then, it appears, that our Saviour communicated to the world ſuch a revelation, relating to the unity and perfections of the true GOD, as was particularly *adapted* to the circumſtances of the idolatrous *Gentiles*, and was, indeed, almoſt abſolutely *neceſſary*, conſidering the deplorable ſtate of ignorance and error, into which they were ſunk.

The *Jews*, it muſt be owned, were right in their ſentiments with reſpect to the *unity* of GOD: for they acknowledged but one ſupreme, eternal, ſelf-exiſtent Being, the Creator and Lord of all. This

* Heb. xi. 6. † Epheſ. i. 3.

This was the firſt principle of their religion. And notwithſtanding the many *revolutions* of their ſtate, their *captivities* in foreign countries, and, above all, their frequent *revoltings* from the GOD of *Iſrael*, and his pure worſhip, to ſuperſtition and idolatry, it was firmly *adhered to* by their whole nation, at the time of *Chriſt*'s appearing. Thus much muſt be ſaid to their honour, though, in ſome other inſtances, their opinions were very corrupt and erroneous. For it is evident, that they thought their *temple* not only to be erected by the *appointment* of GOD, but to have this peculiar prerogative, that in *it alone*, the maker of the world could be ſerved in an *acceptable* manner. They entertained likewiſe weak and childiſh notions of him, as if he could be pleaſed with *ritual* obſervances, with a *ſplendid gay* devotion, and the outward *pomp* and *decorations* of piety; and that theſe were of ſufficient merit to procure his *approbation*, without integrity of heart, or the practice of the indiſpenſible duties of morality. To which we may add, that they had formed a very low and contemptible idea of his goodneſs, *confining* it in a great meaſure to themſelves.

BUT now *chriſtianity* gives us becoming ſentiments of the DEITY, in all theſe reſpects. It repreſents to us—that he is not *the* GOD *of the* Jews *only*, but *of the* Gentiles *alſo* *, i. e. the GOD and father of *all mankind*: that his mercies are *unreſtrained* and *boundleſs*: that he is *no reſpecter of perſons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him* †. It aſſerts, that as he is an omnipreſent ſpirit, he can pay no regard to circumſtances of *time* and *place*, and the trifles of external *ſhow* and *ceremony*; but only to rational *devotion*, and ſolid uſeful *virtue*: and that, therefore, though ſomething of this kind was proper to be *indulged*, to a people of a *low genius*, fond of *pageantry*, to keep

 them

* Rom. iii. 29. † Acts x. 34, 35.

them ſeparate from *idolaters*, and prevent an *imitation* of their ſuperſtitious cuſtoms; under the *goſpel*, which is the laſt and moſt perfect ſcheme of revealed religion, *all places* are upon a *level*. The *univerſe itſelf* is, now, the *temple* of GOD; and the only *conſecration* and *ſanctity* required, is that of the heart, and manners, of the worſhiper. Direct to this purpoſe, and ever memorable, are the words of our Lord himſelf, in his conference with the woman of *Samaria*; with which I ſhall conclude this head: *Our fathers* (ſaid ſhe) *worſhiped in this mountain* [mount *Gerizim*] *and ye ſay, that in* Jeruſalem *is the place, where men ought to worſhip. Jeſus* anſwered, *Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye ſhall neither in this mountain, nor yet at* Jeruſalem, *worſhip the Father— But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worſhipers ſhall worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth: for the Father ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him* *.

WHENCE, then, does it ariſe, that, in nations *profeſſing Chriſtianity*, ſuch great multitudes are ſunk into moſt deplorable *ignorance* of GOD; and form ſuch abſurd and diſhonourable ideas of his perfections and providence, as were ſcarce exceeded by the *pagan* world, who were entirely deſtitute of the light of revelation? Of this ſtrange event, various cauſes may be aſſigned.

AND, FIRST, one great reaſon of this is, that the bulk of the world are too apt to form their notions of GOD, from what they feel in *themſelves*; from their own paſſions, and prejudices, and miſtaken ideas of perfection. The things they moſt *affect*, they haſtily conclude muſt be *agreeable* to him; and *whatever it be*, that, for its grandeur or excellence, is the chief object of their *admiration*, they think they do him *honour*, by making it *a part* of his character.

* John iv. 20, 21, 22, 23.

ter. So that their ſentiments of the DEITY are, in a great meaſure, *conſtitutional*, or the effects of a deluded *fancy*; inſtead of being built on deliberate and impartial *reflection:* and their natural temper, the courſe of their own inclinations, and private views, *influence*, and give a *tincture*, to all their reaſonings; and put them upon aſcribing, to the infinite and moſt perfect being, the very *blemiſhes* of human nature.

INDEED, were we to judge only from the general *profeſſions* of mankind, they entertain the moſt magnificent and exalted ideas of the Creator, and governor, of the univerſe; they compliment him with the higheſt titles of dignity and reſpect; and repreſent him as the abſolute pattern both of natural, and moral, excellence. But, notwithſtanding theſe ſolemn and pompous declarations, we ſhall find, that their *apprehenſions* of him ſink very *low*, when we come to examine particular inſtances; and that partiality, intereſt, and ſelf-conceit, have abuſed and perverted their *judgment*, and led them into very groſs *miſtakes*, in oppoſition to the plain nature and truth of things.

I MIGHT illuſtrate this by a variety of examples; but ſhall content myſelf with mentioning two, that are directly to the point, and an undeniable demonſtration of it to every one, that has made juſt obſervations on mankind.—If any are haughty and imperious, deſirous of eſteem and popularity; if they keep their inferiors and dependents at an unreaſonable diſtance, expect extraordinary tokens of honour, and that their favour be purchaſed by cringing and flattery; it is eaſy to be conceived, how ſuch perſons as theſe, miſled and blinded by their *pride*, may imagine, that the great GOD, *likewiſe*, is pleaſed with *ſuppliant* poſtures, and *fawning* ſubmiſſions, and a *ſervile dread* of his omnipotence: and that *his*

approbation, or diſlike, are as *fickle* and *variable* as their own; and determined by our being *nice*, or *defective*, in trifling punctilios of ceremony.——And, again, gloomy and ſuſpicious tempers, which are prone to entertain groundleſs jealouſies, and doubt of the friendſhip and kind intentions of their fellow-creatures, lead to dark and uncomfortable notions of the *Creator himſelf*; to repreſent him as ſullen, moroſe, and revengeful; and to diſquiet the mind with anxious diſtracting *fears*, that even the brighteſt diſplays of his univerſal goodneſs, throughout the whole ſcope of nature and providence, ſhall not be able to *diſpel*.

SECONDLY, another ground of falſe and injurious apprehenſions of GOD, very different from the foregoing, is this, that though men too commonly frame their opinions of the DEITY, from their own *paſſions* and *frailties*, they do not take the ſame method, in judging of what are *real perfections*; but ſuppoſe juſtice and goodneſs, in the *Creator*, to be quite different from what they are in *his creatures*; and, upon this principle, aſcribe ſometimes ſuch deſigns and actions to him, as contradict all our natural ſentiments of equity and mercy. How this comes to paſs, ſince the contrary might be expected, not only from the *reaſon* of the thing, but from mens *fondneſs* for themſelves, and their *conduct* in other caſes, is not my buſineſs, at preſent, to inquire. The matter of fact is unqueſtionable: And, therefore, it is ſufficient to ſay, that though *truth* be, and muſt be, ſhewn to be *uniform*, we are not obliged to account for the *inconſiſtencies* of *falſhood*. Now the immediate tendency, of this notion, to corrupt and darken our apprehenſions concerning the DEITY, will appear upon a very little reflection. For whoever believes, that the general principles of juſtice and goodneſs are diſtinct in GOD, from what they are in MAN; and yet does not pretend to fix, and determine preciſely,

ciſely, wherein this *difference* conſiſts; but uſes it only for the *ſolution* of difficulties, that are, upon common principles, *unanſwerable*; whoever believes this (to ſay the leaſt) can have no idea at all of GOD's moral character, which is the grand foundation and ſupport of all religion.

INDEED, particular actions may be agreeable to the ſtricteſt right and equity, in the *Proprietor* and *ſovereign diſpoſer* of all things, which would be unjuſt in the conduct of *men* toward each other. GOD, for inſtance, the *Lord* and *giver* of *life*, the original *ſource* of *all being*, and of every good, canput a period to our *preſent exiſtence* whenever he pleaſes; though the *man*, who attempts the *life* of his brother, his equal, over whom the common creator has given him no ſuch *authority*, violates the ſacred law of *juſtice*. But if we go farther, and ſuppoſe, that the Supreme being may, without being *unjuſt*, determine the final and remedileſs miſery of great numbers of his reaſonable creatures, merely for the *oſtentation* of his ſovereign and irreſiſtible *power*; ſuch a deſcription of him is the utmoſt reproach, that can be fixed, on his moral excellence, and, at the ſame time, utterly confounds all diſtinction between good and evil.

IN the THIRD place, even the high *veneration* and *reverence*, which men conceive for GOD, may be, ſometimes, the occaſion of their forming irrational notions of his attributes, and the operations of his providence. Thus, in countries where *Popery* is eſtabliſhed, that maſter-piece of all abſurdities, the doctrine of *tranſubſtantiation*, is ſupported by this principle, that the *power* of GOD extends even to thoſe things, which are contradictions to nature, and to the common ſenſe and reaſon of mankind. This, in the directors and managers of the publick faith, may perhaps be

be nothing but *artifice*; but there are, I make no doubt, many perſons of *integrity*, who heartily eſpouſe this opinion, influenced chiefly by this plauſible pretence, that it gives them a more grand and elevated idea of the divine *omnipotence*.

AGAIN, charity obliges us to believe, that it ſprings from the ſame foundation, *viz.* a ſincere deſire to *exalt* the *glory*, and ſupreme *majeſty* of GOD, that his ſovereign and abſolute *authority*, to diſpoſe of the *happineſs* and *miſery* of his creatures, without any regard to their *ſeveral qualifications*, has been repreſented in ſuch a high and unaccountable ſtrain; and that it is to raiſe him, at the greateſt poſſible *diſtance* from all finite natures, that his actions are exempted from thoſe general rules, which all intelligent beings muſt be for ever bound to obſerve.

AND, to mention but one inſtance more, it proceeds from the ſame principle, that ſo many ſet themſelves to magnify the *grace* of GOD, by enfeebling and deſtroying the *powers* of human nature; by repreſenting it as *impotent* to good, and having an *overruling*, if not a *neceſſitating*, biaſs to vice and wickedneſs, and, conſequently, aſcribing the whole of our *converſion*, and *progreſs* in true religion and virtue, to a *divine efficacious operation*.—By which the liberty of human actions is deſtroyed, and all moral government diſſolved.

AGAIN, falſe notions of GOD are propagated, like moſt other errors, by tradition, and received implicitly.—And, indeed, conſidering, how averſe the generality of mankind are to *impartial inquiry*, how apt to be captivated by general *prejudices*, how eaſily frightened by the reproach of *ſingularity*, with what difficulty they get rid of their more *early impreſſions*, when their *fears*,

fears, perhaps, were ſo ſtrongly alarmed, at the danger of deſerting old principles, as to beget a kind of *ſuperſtitious panic* ever afterwards: It is no wonder at all, I ſay, if we conſider all theſe things, that the ſentiments of mankind, about the Author and governor of the univerſe, have been ſo diſhonourable to his ſupreme glory and excellence, and ſo fatal to religion, and the peace of their own minds. To which we may add, that crafty impoſtors, taking advantage of the *credulity* of the people, have uſed all their art and intereſt, to ſupport and eſtabliſh ſuch *falſe* principles, by which, alone, their *ſpiritual tyranny* can be maintained; and the baſe views of *ambition* and *luxury* promoted. For *juſt notions* of GOD, and a *plain rational religion*, without pomp or ceremony, will yield but *ſmall profit*; nor are, conſequently, fited to ſerve the purpoſes of worldly *power* and *policy*, in compariſon with ignorance, enthuſiaſm, and ſuperſtition.

MOST of the cauſes, hitherto mentioned, of erroneous and degrading thoughts of GOD, have been *common* in *all ages*; but it may be proper, in the LAST place, to mention one that is *peculiar* to *Chriſtians*; *viz. miſapplications* and *perverſions* of *ſcripture*. Revelation has indeed guarded, in the moſt effectual manner poſſible, againſt all *groſs abuſes* of *figurative* and *poetical* deſcriptions, by giving in innumerable paſſages, the ſenſe of which is *clear* and *determinate*, the moſt *rational* and *noble* ſentiments of the nature, and perfections, of the DEITY: We may, therefore, juſtly be ſurprized, that any ſhould be *led aſtray* by that very *rule*, which was *deſigned* on purpoſe, and is indeed admirably *calculated*, to rectify all *errors* of this kind.—For when ſuch actions are attributed to the Supreme being, as are inconſiſtent with the plain account of his perfections, which *revelation* always inculcates, as well as with the notices that *reaſon* ſuggeſts, the *literal ſenſe* is

evidently unnatural. So that the miſtakes, which perſons fall into, by perverting paſſages of *ſcripture*, is not owing to any defect in the *rule itſelf*, but to indolence, or prejudice: And, if they would but follow the *natural* and *eaſy* method, of comparing *one part* of revelation with *another*, and interpret ſtrong *figures* and *metaphors*, by the *common principles* of *reaſon*; it is impoſſible they ſhould debaſe their maker, by ſuch groveling and unworthy apprehenſions, or miſtake, in any important points, the general nature of true religion.

IT will now be natural to enquire—What rules are proper to be obſerved, in order to obtain a right knowledge of GOD, and prevent thoſe hurtful errors, which fruſtrate the very deſign of *chriſtianity*, and are indeed, ſubverſive of *all religion?*——And FIRST, in general, we muſt remove from him every thing that implies *limitation* or *weakneſs*; every appearance both of *natural* and *moral defect*; and attribute to him all *real perfections*, in their *higheſt degree:* Conceiving of him, as the eternal firſt cauſe of all things, ſelf-exiſtent, and independent, of unbounded power, unfathomable wiſdom, inflexible juſtice, univerſal and infinite goodneſs; and as a being, whoſe perfection and happineſs are immutable. This rule is ſo obvious, that it needs but little illuſtration. I ſhall therefore only obſerve, that the chief error, we are capable of committing here, is aſcribing to him *imperfections* and *blemiſhes*, under the notion of *excellencies*; for the ſake of exalting his *power* and *dominion*, repreſenting him as *arbitrary*; for the glory of his *juſtice*, making him *ſevere* and *rigorous*; and giving ſuch accounts of his *goodneſs*, as are a reproach to his *wiſdom*, by their incouraging *vice*, and, conſequently, ſubverting the main end of his

his *moral government*. But this leads me to another rule, which is more *particular*; and that is,

In the SECOND place, that we endeavour to get a *juſt* and *diſtinct idea* of the *ſeveral perfections* of the Divine nature. There may, perhaps, be ſome *general idea*, to which all the *moral attributes* of GOD, eſpecially, are reducible. However, a *particular conſideration* of them may be of great uſe, not only to *help* our *conceptions*; but that we may judge, with more certainty, what principles are *fairly inferred*, from the wiſdom, juſtice, or goodneſs of GOD, and when we carry our reaſonings *too far*.——Theſe three perfections are the *ſtandard*, to which we muſt have *recourſe* on all occaſions, to judge aright of the general methods of GOD's providential government: for a defect in *dominion*, or *deſpotic authority*, would not obſcure and eclipſe the glory of the divine nature, in any degree, like acts of *injuſtice* and *cruelty*.

BUT we are ſtill to proceed one ſtep farther, and conſider all the *divine perfections* as inſeparably *united*, and in a *neceſſary harmony* with each other. For, if we imagine our Maker to have only a regard to *ſtrict equity*, and to be deſtitute of *benevolence* and *goodneſs*; or ſuppoſe, that he is *ſevere* in puniſhing, to the very *extreme point* of juſtice, without any *compaſſionate* and *merciful* allowances; we very much weaken the foundation of thoſe *exalted* and *amiable* conceptions of him, which wiſe and thinking men, in all ages, have entertained. We ſhould, in like manner, never conſider the infinite *power* of GOD, but as it is conducted by conſummate *wiſdom* and *equity*. And, then, inſtead of being *formidable*, and exciting *diſlike* and *averſion*, it will be an *aweful* indeed, but at the ſame time a moſt *delightful*, object of contemplation.

Thus does the *diſtinguiſhed*, and *unrivalled glory* of the divine perfections ariſe from their *united luſtre*, and *conſpiring* to one *common* end.

To conclude, if we proceed on the principles which have now been laid down, and avoid the cauſes of error which have been particularly ſpecified, we are likely to be fixed and confirmed in juſt, honourable, and comfortable notions of the nature, attributes, and providence of GOD, and to build on theſe a rational ſcheme of religion; and ſhall have the ſtrongeſt motives, that both reaſon and revelation can ſuggeſt, to an exact imitation of his moral excellencies, in which conſiſt our ſupreme dignity and happineſs. This laſt, indeed, is the ultimate uſe of all our reflections on this great and important ſubject.—*Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect* *.

BUT why, perhaps ſome may ſtill aſk, are we only inſtructed in the principles of the *religion of nature?* I anſwer in general, that it muſt be evident to all, that this queſtion is not rightly ſtated; becauſe, as I have treated theſe ſubjects, they are, throughout, the principles of the *religion* of *nature*, with the *chriſtian* comment and illuſtration. And to ſhow more fully, that there is no ground for any reaſonable objection upon this account, I would only deſire, that the following things may be candidly and impartially conſidered.

FIRST, that all the eſſential principles of the *religion of nature*, and the moral duties connected with, and obviouſly reſulting from it, muſt alſo be included in the *religion of the goſpel*, as moſt important and eſſential branches of that likewiſe; becauſe it is abſolutely impoſſible, that there ſhould be *any religion* at all, but what

 is

* Matt. v. 48.

is founded on theſe original truths and obligations; there can in nature be *no other ground* for the authority of GOD over rational creatures, nor for any homage and duty to be paid him. And, accordingly, it is undeniable, that *Chriſt*, and his apoſtles, conſtantly urged and inculcated theſe neceſſary foundations, and unalterable branches, of all pure and uncorrupted piety, under the *preciſe character*, by which they *diſtinguiſhed* themſelves—of perſons extraordinarily commiſſioned and authorized from above.

AGAIN, there is not one of the *peculiar doctrines*, which our bleſſed Saviour taught, but what either immediately, or in its final ſcope and intention, is adapted to illuſtrate, confirm, and enforce, the eſſential articles of ſpeculative truth, and eternal morality, which are plainly comprehended within the juſt extent of *natural religion*.—And can points of ſuch high *rank* and *moment*, to *explain* and *eſtabliſh* which, is the ultimate end of the *Chriſtian inſtitution*, be repreſented, with the leaſt colour of reaſon, as not *eſſentially belonging* to that inſtitution? Can *diſcoveries* made, *poſitive duties* required, or *privileges* propoſed, merely with a view to promote this great *end* (and which themſelves, therefore, muſt be conſidered as having the energy and uſe of *means* only) be, without the utmoſt abſurdity, accounted the *chief ſubſtance* of the diſpenſation and ſcheme of the goſpel? Can that be a wiſe ſyſtem of religion, which conſiſts of *all means*, and *no end*; or which advances means *above* ends? On the other hand, does not the reaſon of every man's mind plainly inform him, that the end muſt, in the natural train and arrangement of our ideas, be the *principal* and more *ſubſtantial* part, and the other the *lower* and *ſubordinate* part?

BUT there are other conſequences, from the ſuppoſition which I now argue againſt, that are rather more abſurd, than thoſe already mentioned.—For, if the main *ſubſtance* of the *goſpel* be really confined to thoſe *peculiar doctrines*, which are entirely *revealed truths*, that *reaſon* could not diſcover (in *excluſion* of thoſe *natural truths* relating to GOD, and thoſe *natural laws* of GOD, which are the moſt weighty and ſacred branches of all true religion) it muſt then, inſtead of being the *completion* of all ſchemes, fall vaſtly *ſhort* of what the light of nature itſelf teaches; and be, comparatively ſpeaking, a low and defective inſtitution: nay, it will be abſolutely impoſſible, upon the plan and model of *chriſtianity* alone (in this *limited* and *excluſive* conſideration of it) for any man to obtain favour and acceptance with GOD; becauſe this glorious and ineſtimable privilege can never be ſecured, by any *expedient*, while the government of GOD continues to be *holy*, and *wiſe*, and *conſiſtent with itſelf*, as well as gracious and bountiful, without the ſincere practice of that univerſal virtue and goodneſs, to which *natural religion* obliges all mankind.—The ſum and eſſence of the *goſpel*, therefore, cannot be ſuppoſed to ly in its *new* and *ſingular diſcoveries*, without derogating from its heavenly dignity, and ſtaining its honour; and giving occaſion to thoſe, who are already too deeply and unhappily prejudiced, to entertain a more diminutive and degrading notion of it: but the certain *principles*, and plain *duties*, of the *firſt* and *univerſal* religion, which are diſcoverable by the light of reaſon, and ſpring from the nature of man, and his inviolable relation to the DEITY, muſt alſo be allowed to conſtitute *a part* of it; and if any, moſt ſurely, as was hinted before, a very *conſiderable*, a ſtrictly *eſſential*, nay the *ſupreme* part; to which each diſtinct doctrine, of the whole ſcheme of *mere revelation*, muſt ever be ſubſervient.

AND thus, I think, I have fully vindicated, againſt all juſt exceptions, my attempt to illuſtrate and confirm the chief articles of *natural religion*. I have aimed in it, ultimately, at the advancement of the *glory of* CHRIST, and the *exaltation* of his divine religion. It is my firm opinion, that, upon no other foundation but this, it can be *ſolidly* ſupported. All other methods of defending *chriſtianity*, I take to be, in reality, raiſing *a ſuperſtructure* without *a foundation*. And I take this opportunity to declare, in an age in which *ſcepticiſm* prevails to a high degree, that I eſteem it an *honour* to be a firm *believer*, and, from devotedneſs of mind, a *preacher*, and *public advocate* for the *chriſtian inſtitution*; and think all thoſe, juſtly chargeable with great baſeneſs, puſillanimity, and hypocriſy, who either *preach* it, or *profeſs* it, for the ſake of *popularity*, or any *worldly conſideration* whatſoever, without being themſelves real and hearty *Chriſtians*.

ADDI-

ADDITIONAL

DISCOURSES

AND

SERMONS.

DISC. I. *On* moral liberty.

II. *Of the darkneſs of* human reaſon; *and the corruptions of* Chriſtianity.

III. *Of the* nature, *and* true principle, *of honour.*

IV. *An* eſtimate, *and* defence, of *human life.*

V. *Of* ſelf-government; *and the duty of* ſelf-denial.

SERM. I. *Of* catholic communion.

II. *The reaſons of* Chriſt's *requiring* faith, *in order to his* miraculous cures.

III. *Of the number of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved.*

IV. *Of the true* guard *of innocence*; *and the natural* progreſs of vice.

DISCOURSE I.

On moral liberty.

I HAVE often thought, in what a mean and diſagreeable light the bulk of *mankind* muſt appear, if ſome *ſuperior* ſpirit, of more ſublime and inlarged intelligence, ſhould ſet himſelf to ſurvey their *conduct*; and conſider *the manner*, in which their apprehenſions are formed, the *objects*, by which their affections are engaged, and the *motives*, which influence their moſt important purſuits. The reflection itſelf is natural, and muſt undeniably be of conſiderable uſe, if it was often entertained, to inſpire *ingenuity*, check our *preſumption* in a wrong courſe, and rectify innumerable *prejudices*, to which we are unhappily ſubject. For one of the firſt remarks, that ſuch a wiſe and impartial obſerver muſt make, would be this; that in thoſe points, where a juſt judgment might be moſt *certainly* and *eaſily* acquired, and where no *labour*, no *ſtrain* of thought, is neceſſary (ſcarce any thing more, indeed, than that the underſtanding be *open* and *attentive*) in ſuch caſes as theſe, I ſay, he would find, that the generality are moſt liable to *err*; and in points too, that are the *ground-work* of all right reaſonings, and foundation-principles of wiſdom, honour, and ſolid felicity.

AND this melancholy deluſion, if the above-ſuppoſed judicious inſpector into the *ill-concerted* ſcene of human life was to trace it farther, would appear to ariſe, in a great meaſure, from hence; that men, inſtead of being ſolicitous to obtain *realities*, are amuſed and betrayed by *ſpecious appearances*, and the force of *ſounds*, that have no reaſonable meaning. So that both the *happineſs* they propoſe to ſecure, and the *liberty* they boaſt of, are merely *nominal*; having no place in *nature*, but only a chimerical exiſtence, in *fancy* and *perverted opinion*. While their notions are ſo clouded and confuſed, that, without diſcerning their *ſelf-flattery*, they can indulge themſelves with the *words* liberty and happineſs (in this caſe, to allude to St. *Peter*'s phraſe, words of mere pomp and vanity) they are ſtupidly content to be ſubſtantially *miſerable*, and reduced to the moſt ignominious *ſervitude*.

TRUE LIBERTY, indeed, is in *itſelf* an ineſtimable *privilege*, the *prerogative* of the human nature *only* in this part of the creation of GOD; and a ſublime noble reward of all its generous efforts, to *improve* and *exalt* its faculties. The term therefore, whether from a natural inwrought *ſenſe*, or from the prevalence of *cuſtom* and *habit*, is in a manner become *ſacred*; and held in a kind of *ſuperſtitious veneration*, by all ranks and degrees of men. I ſay, *ſuperſtitious veneration*, with reſpect to many at leaſt; 'be-'cauſe though all *applaud*, there are but few that *underſtand* it.' The firſt thing therefore, that we are led to enquire into, in order to the juſt explanation of this ſubject, is, wherein conſiſts the *nature* of that *liberty*, which is, in itſelf, the glory and perfection of a reaſonable being, and the ſource of its moſt pure and elevated happineſs.

AND,

AND, in general, 'liberty is a ſort of *middle* point, between the 'two *extremes* of *ſlavery* and *licentiouſneſs*; and though it may 'ſeem to *incline* rather to the *latter*, is, in reality, equally *diſtant* 'from *both*. For to be *licentious*, in a *moral* ſenſe, is to be, ex-'actly in the ſame proportion, *enſlaved*.' And in every poſſible idea, which we can form of *licentiouſneſs*, it deſtroys that *order*, which is always inſeparable from *true liberty*; and by breaking through the *fences* and *barriers*, that are neceſſary for its preſervation and ſecurity, prepares the way for the introduction of *tyranny* and *oppreſſion*. On the other hand, if, in civil ſocieties, the ſubjects are kept in a ſtate of *ſervitude*, and deprived of the common unalienable *rights* of men, there muſt, of neceſſity, be a *licentiouſneſs* of *power* in thoſe that govern, repugnant to natural equity. And here likewiſe, in a *moral* eſtimate, no man can be ſaid to be *a ſlave*, but ſo far as he acts *irregularly*, or allows himſelf in the gratification of ſome *inordinate* and *lawleſs* paſſion.—So that the two *extremes* above mentioned, always *go together*; and muſt, of conſequence, be abſolutely and equally *inconſiſtent* with all rational and deſirable *liberty*.

BUT it is neceſſary for us, to enter into a more particular examination and diſcuſſion of the ſubject; and, therefore, I would obſerve further, that the *liberty*, of which I am now treating, is intirely *inward*. It does not immediately refer either to what is called *civil liberty*, or to the unmoleſted enjoyment of the *rights* of *conſcience* (though both theſe are exceedingly valuable, and vaſtly to be preferred to all the ſplendor and gratifications of ſlaviſh pomp and luxury) but to the *freedom* of *a man*, conſidered as a *conſtitution*, *ſyſtem*, or *government*, *entire within himſelf*. The *ſeat* of this liberty is *reaſon* and *conſcience*, and the *affections* and *deſires* of

the mind. So that, in this view, 'the *ſubject*, or member of a 'political community, and the *profeſſor* of *religion*, may be *free*, 'while *the man* is held in *chains*.' On the contrary, 'human na-'ture may aſſert and maintain that *freedom*, that is moſt intimate 'and eſſential to itſelf, and triumph in the *uncontrouled* exerciſe of 'it, in ſpite of all the inſolent *uſurpations* and *incroachments* of an 'unrighteous and arbitrary power.'

AND what now does the natural light, afforded to the human mind, direct us to fix upon as *the liberty of a man within himſelf*, and in his own proper frame and compoſition?——Why, in the FIRST place, the frame of a man is that of an *intelligent* being; and, therefore, it is directly impoſſible, 'that it ſhould include in 'it *a liberty* to act *unreaſonably*, and as if he was utterly deſtitute 'of intelligence:' For this is to ſuppoſe nature to be a *contradiction*, and the author of it *abſurd*.

AGAIN, it is the *liberty* of one, in whom there is placed a preſiding and authoritative *moral principle*, to regulate animal propenſion, and controul appetite; 'it cannot, therefore, imply in it *a* '*liberty*, in any ſingle inſtance, to ſupport the *animal* nature, ſo as 'to depreſs and ſubjugate the *moral*, or to exalt *appetite* to the ſeat 'of command and *ſupreme* influence:' Becauſe this muſt quite *efface* the original *human* conſtitution, and throw the whole fabric into *confuſion*; and muſt introduce a ſcene, altogether as irregular and monſtrous, as it would be, 'if the ſituation of things and the 'order of government could be ſo totally *inverted*, in the external 'viſible world, as that *brute creatures* ſhould obtain, and exer-'ciſe, dominion over *men*.'

WE

We are led one ſtep farther, by the general principles from which we have hitherto argued, and brought fairly and unexceptionably on to the great point of all, and that is, after having demonſtrated what the *proper freedom* of a man *is not*, and *cannot be*, to fix and aſcertain what it *really is*. For if it be the *liberty* of a *reaſonable* and *moral* frame, there is but this one account that can be given of it, *viz.* 'that it conſiſts in *reaſon*, and the moral faculty called *conſcience*, *exerting* itſelf freely, *dictating* freely, and *governing* freely; that all lower and oppoſite principles be ſo far ſubdued, as not to interfere with, and cramp, this *inward rule*, or obſtruct its *authority*: ſo that human nature may proceed, *readily* and *regularly*, in diſcharging all the offices, which are neceſſary to its right order and perfection; and purſue, ſurmounting all *oppoſition*, the ultimate and great end, which the creator had in view, in its formation, of its moral rectitude and happineſs.'

To illuſtrate this argument yet more fully, it will not be improper to conſider, how the caſe ſtands with reſpect to the *ſupreme being*. He is poſſeſſed of the moſt *excellent* and *perfect liberty*.—But *how* is he *free*? And wherein lies the *tranſcendent* and *ſupreme* perfection of that *liberty*, which the firſt and greateſt of all beings enjoys? It cannot, ſurely, ly here, 'that he allows of no unalterable *meaſures* of right and wrong; or admits no *rules* of his conduct, but what his own *will*, and boundleſs *power*, may *annull* at pleaſure:' For this would repreſent him as capricious and mutable; and is, beſides, a flat contradiction to the *known* and *experienced* courſe of his proceedings; in which, tracing him throughout all *nature*, and the order of *moral adminiſtration* in the uni-

univerſe, not wantonneſs of *power*, but the eternal rule of *right*, appears to be the invariable ſtandard.

THE *freedom* therefore of the DEITY, and his ſole incommunicable glory, conſiſts in this, 'that he is always *determined*, by his 'infinite *wiſdom*, to exerciſe juſtice and truth; to delight in benefi-'cence and mercy; and on account of his ſelf-ſufficiency and in-'dependent happineſs, joined with his infinite knowledge of what 'is fit and proper to be done in all circumſtances, can have no '*biaſs* or *temptation* to do evil.' So that, without any the leaſt *obſtruction* or *impediment*, he acts *ſuitably* to the moſt illuſtrious and adoreable part of his ſupreme character, as the firſt *moral* being in the univerſe; the *parent* of all others, the *ſource* and *pattern* of every thing amiable and excellent. Though he is under no *phyſical neceſſity* of preferring righteouſneſs, fidelity, and clemency, to falſhood and tyrannical rigours of government; yet there is *no motive*, either from *within* or *without*, that can *influence* his *will*, to reſolve upon the leaſt act of injuſtice or cruelty.

AND the *leſs reſiſtance*, any *other* beings find, in imitating the moral character of the infinite and eternal father of all, they muſt, of conſequence, in the moſt generous ſenſe of the term, be *proportionably free*. Thoſe in the *human race*, therefore, are advanced to the higheſt ſtate of *liberty*, 'who can purſue, with the leaſt of 'wrong diſpoſition, and irregular tendency, *interrupting* or *retard-'ing* their progreſs, the utmoſt pitch of human knowledge and 'morality.'

UPON the whole of what has been offered, the following propoſitions remain, I hope, undeniable. That by the *liberty* of *a man*, cannot be meant a *freedom* from *moralties*, unleſs man could alſo

alſo diveſt himſelf of his *moral capacities*—That it cannot denote a ſtate of *abſolute indifference* to virtue and vice; becauſe it is utterly unbecoming, and indeed impoſſible (unleſs it be in romantic theory) that the *inclination* to both theſe ſhould be the *ſame*, or the *motives* to both appear, to a reaſonable mind, the *ſame*, if either *virtue* has the preference, or *vice* the preference; and becauſe they are diametrically *oppoſite* both in their nature and effects; and, to mention no more, becauſe if there was this *abſolute indifference*, and *equality of determination*, neither could poſſibly be purſued as *a courſe*, or *habit*, of life. This therefore is a mere viſionary ſcheme.—But from hence it neceſſarily follows, ſince *liberty* cannot mean this perfect *indifference* of *inclination* as to moral good and evil, from hence, I ſay, it neceſſarily follows, 'that it can 'only denote the *power* of following, without *controul*, the law 'and bent of nature; of reaſoning juſtly, without having the un-'derſtanding *awed* by groundleſs terrors, or *amuſed* by gay imagi-'nations, or *darkened* by ſuperſtition; the *power* of *determining*, 'according to the preſcriptions of a ſedate and enlightned under-'ſtanding, and of *executing* all the wiſe and juſt purpoſes of the 'mind.—So that, to ſum up all, when we act as intelligence and 'ſound wiſdom direct, we commence *manly*, and are partakers of '*god-like*, liberty.'

And what an honour is this, for thoſe who are ambitious of *glory* to aſpire to! What an uncorrupted and fruitful ſource is here of real ſatisfaction and joy, to engage the purſuit of thoſe, who are addicted to the love of *pleaſure!* He, that is in poſſeſſion of *this liberty*, muſt always feel its invigorating influence, as a ſpring of inward *dignity* and *ſelf-approbation*. He finds much more *delight* in converſing with himſelf, than the moſt warm and zealous advocate for *civil liberty* can poſſibly feel, ſuppoſing him to be in the moſt

extenſive enjoyment of it, when, in the higheſt ardour and exultation of his ſpirits, he compares the advantages of his own outward condition, with that of the baſeſt and moſt miſerable *ſervitude*. And to ſhow the *preheminence*, which GOD himſelf has ſtamped on this kind of liberty, above all others, we need no more than this ſingle reflection, *viz.*— 'that whereas he has ordained a mutual 'dependance of men upon one another, with reſpect to their *com-* 'mon intereſts; and whereas the ſettlement of things is ſo contrived 'and adjuſted, that we may be deprived of every branch of *exter-* 'nal liberty, without our *own fault*, and without having any poſ- 'ſible means to *prevent* this misfortune from befalling us; the 'freedom of men, in the *ſyſtem* and *government* of human nature 'itſelf, is abſolutely *in their own keeping*, becauſe their *perſonal* 'honour, and the rectitude and happineſs of *each individual*, are 'eſſentially *connected* with it.' I ſhall only add, that there is ſo ſtrict and indiſſoluble a connection between the ſeveral *faculties* of the human mind, that if the *underſtanding* be ſo *enſlaved*, as not to be able to exert itſelf, free from confuſion, and perverſe biaſſes, in the diſcovery of *truth*; the *will*, and all the *affections* of the ſoul, will be in the ſame degree *limited* and *controulted*. So that *intellectual* and *moral* liberty are cloſely linked together, and, in the reaſon of things, can ſcarce be ſeparated.

DIS-

DISCOURSE II.

Of the darkneſs of human reaſon; *and the corruptions of* chriſtianity.

THE wiſe and merciful creator of mankind, having intended them for *moral agents*, capable of a *voluntary* ſubjection to his government, and *accountable* for their behaviour, has indued them with *reaſon* to be the light of their minds, and the rule and guide of their actions. Had they been formed *deſtitute* of this *intellectual light*, they muſt have been ranked with other mere *animals:* And though they might, perhaps, have been furniſhed with higher degrees of *ſagacity*, and acted by different *inſtincts*, that bore a ſtronger *reſemblance* of reaſon; yet, they would have been equally *incapable*, by the imperfection of their very frame, of tracing out the obligations of *religion*, and of all the exalted pleaſures of *virtue*, and *morality*.

AND from hence it follows, by moſt evident and neceſſary conſequence, that if the judgment be *corrupted*, and the underſtanding *quite darkened*, with reſpect to *religious* principles, and *moral* truths, which concern the rectitude, and juſt conduct, and true happineſs of intelligent and free beings; if this, I ſay, be the caſe—

from whatever *cauſe* it ſprings, and by whatever *means* it proceeds to this fatal *extreme*, it may then be affirmed, that a man is really in as *unhappy* a ſituation, and as much without *any guide*, for the preſent, that can lead and direct him right; as if he had been formed with a natural *incapacity* of reaſoning, *unable* to diſcern the proper difference of actions and characters, and the neceſſary duties of his ſtation. Nay, in every ſuch inſtance, he is much more *wretched*, than he could have been, if he *wanted entirely* an inward principle of judgment, and ſelf-determination; becauſe he is impoſed upon by *falſe lights*, and miſled by a *deceitful* and *erroneous guide*; and, oftentimes, without being *ſenſible* of his folly or danger.

RELIGION is wholly *founded* in *reaſon*, and *directed* by it: And, therefore, when this light, give me leave to ſay this *ſacred*, this *divine* light, is not attended to; when *imagination*, and *paſſion*, and *prejudice*, and *falſe conceptions*, uſurp the place, and are allowed all the authority and influence, which *only* belong to truth, and the dictates of a ſober and well-informed judgment; it muſt unavoidably follow, either that religion will be openly *inſulted* by impiety and vice, or *defaced* and *ſullied* by unnatural mixtures of extravagance, and enthuſiaſm.

THE *faculty* of reaſon may ſtill remain, and the natural *capacity* of judging rightly; but *reaſon* cannot, ſurely, be ſtiled *a light*, as long as it is perverted, and entertains falſe principles with reſpect to the eſſentials of religion, and the regulation of life and manners. No: while it continues in this ſtate, the utmoſt that can be affirmed of it is, 'that it may, one time or other, *become* a *light*, 'but is, at preſent, *clouded* and *obſcured*.' For *the light of reaſon*, being a *metaphorical* expreſſion, can mean nothing more than the *diſcoveries* it makes, its *juſt notions*, and *true diſcernment* of things:

things: and, therefore, while it lays down *abſurd* and *hurtful* princip'es, as *fundamental* points in arguing, and acts upon the wrong *conſequences*, which naturally reſult from ſuch principles, the underſtanding is, *ſo far*, overſpread with thick and deplorable *darkneſs*. But as this ſubject is of the utmoſt importance, ſince it is a ſtriking at the *root* of that *ignorance*, and thoſe *vicious exceſſes* which have ever been lamented by the wiſe and good; at the *root* of *atheiſm* and *impiety*; and the more *dangerous attacks* that have been made upon religion, under the *name*, and ſpecious *pretence*, of religion; it muſt, upon theſe accounts, deſerve a more particular diſcuſſion. I ſhall therefore begin—with pointing out, briefly, ſome of the moſt *conſiderable* and *general cauſes*, by which the light of reaſon is *obſcured*, and the judgment *perverted* and *inſlaved*; cauſes, that have been the moſt *prevailing* in all ages; and which, as long as they are allowed to ſubſiſt, will, in all future times, have the ſame *uniform* and *fatal efficacy*.

AND the FIRST of theſe, that will immediately preſent itſelf to the moſt ſuperficial obſerver (as being, indeed, the *epidemical* diſtemper of mankind) is *indolence* and *inattention*. Every one muſt acknowledge, who knows any thing of human nature, what I have before taken notice of, *viz.* that it is not the mere *faculty* of reaſon, that illuminates the mind; but the right *exerciſe*, and careful *improvement* of it, by frequent reflection, and impartial enquiry. For a man of the moſt *ſtrong* and *extenſive* natural abilities, who never *thinks*, and never *examines*, cannot be expected (ſince it is indeed an impoſſibility in nature) to make *half* the proficiency in *divine* knowledge, as a more *deliberate* and *ingenuous* inquirer, of a much *inferior* underſtanding. Nay, his judgment may be as *weak* and *confuſed*, for want of proper care to inform it aright, and through a ſhameful negligence, ariſing from indifference and ſtupi-

dity of mind; his reaſon may be as groſly *fallacious*, and his principles as *extravagant* even to common ſenſe; as *any* that can be ſuppoſed to find admittance, where human reaſon is in its *loweſt* and moſt *imperfect* ſtate. So that *indolence*, and, which are the neceſſary conſequences of it, *lazineſs*, and *ſuperficial examination*, are the *certain foundation* of error, and intellectual darkneſs. To a *heedleſs inconſiderate* temper, which takes no pains to *diſtinguiſh*, and *aſcertain* the real differences of things, *all objects* muſt appear in *confuſion*; truth and falſehood may paſs promiſcuouſly crowded and blended together; or, at leaſt, *falſehood* may be eaſily *impoſed*, when it is *plauſibly* recommended, and adorned and ſet off with *artificial* colourings: of conſequence, therefore, an *unconcerned* and *liſtleſs* frame of mind, that will not ſubmit to the *fatigue* of thinking, nor allow *time* for acquiring ſolid and well-digeſted notions, is a *natural inlet* to the moſt extreme malignity and corruption of *principles*, and the worſt irregularities in *practice*.

But, SECONDLY, another common *cauſe* of inward darkneſs is *prejudice*; which throws *a miſt* before the underſtanding, and hinders it from diſcerning, clearly, the evidences, and beauties, and advantages of truth. It gives the judgment a particular and ſtrong *biaſs* towards *one ſet* of principles, which, of conſequence, are readily admitted as the *beſt* and moſt *rational*; and the contrary truths, though of the moſt momentous kind, are as naturally *diſcredited* and *vilified*: the *arguments*, by which they are recommended, are diminiſhed, and reduced to mere trifles; but the *objections* againſt them magnified, as deciſive and unanſwerable. Thus will *prejudice*, though of the moſt groſs and malignant kind, *ingroſs* all the fairneſs, candour, and ſkill in argument, to *itſelf*, and *paint*, on the ſide of *truth* and *reaſon*, nothing but ſuperficial knowledge, and narrowneſs of mind.—The prejudices, by which mankind

mankind are influenced, are *various*, but have, *all*, the ſame *infatuating* and *blinding* quality: for whether it be the prejudice of *education*, or the prejudice of *intereſt*, or the prejudice of implicit veneration for *great names*, and ſubmiſſion to *human authority*; which ſoever of theſe, I ſay, bears the principal ſway, it has always tended to the ſame point——and the effect of it has been this, the making men *conceited* of their *ignorance*, and *obſtinate* in *error*.

AGAIN, *ſenſuality* is a never-failing means of *darkening* and *perverting* the judgment; and muſt always produce the ſame conſequence *hereafter*, according to the fixed and unalterable courſe of things. For, by inflaming the *paſſions*, it indiſpoſes the mind for the *calm contemplation*, and *purſuit*, of truth *in general*. It *depreſſes* the very faculty of *reaſon*, and renders it *unfit* for ſublime occupations. It ſuppoſes the appetites to be *impetuous*, *fierce*, and *ungoverned*; and, of conſequence, that the inward ſtate of the ſoul is *unquiet* and *tumultuous*. It introduces a *falſe taſte*, and deſtroys our *reliſh* of *mental* pleaſures. For *ſenſe*, and *reaſon*, are ſuch contrary principles, that if the gratification of the *firſt* be our ſupreme and moſt favoured entertainment, we ſhall regard the *latter*, ſo much the leſs in proportion; and, perhaps, contract an utter averſion to its *employments* and *exerciſes*. But, in an uncommon degree, does *ſenſuality* unfit for an impartial ſtudy of *religious* and *moral truth*; againſt which it inſpires a *prejudice*, of which it muſt needs entertain ſome kind of *horror*, as of a *reprover*, a *condemner*, an *awakener* of guilty ſuſpicions, and a *ſcourge* of lawleſs exceſſes. To what a ſad condition muſt that man be reduced, whoſe diſpoſitions and conduct, in a manner, force him to *dread*, and *fly* from *thinking*, that he may be the more *quietly* and *ſerenely* miſerable!

AND

AND in the FOURTH place, next to *ſenſuality*, the moſt univerſal *corrupter* of good principles, and *extinguiſher* of reaſon's light, is *ſuperſtition*. It alarms with *panic* terrors, and makes a man afraid of *free enquiry*; as if *honeſty* and *ingenuity* of mind, which are the very eſſence, and genuine ſpirit, of an acceptable *virtue* and *piety*, were *crimes* that deſerved *damnation*; and an abject ſlaviſh *credulity*, which is a reproach to the character of *a man*, was, however, the chief excellence and duty of *religion*, and the ſureſt recommendation to the eſteem and favour of the DEITY. Superſtition always ſprings from *weakneſs* of mind: it ſuppoſes the *underſtanding* to be diſturbed, and *fancy*, and *fear*, or *preſumption*, to have the aſcendent: and as theſe prevail farther, the *judgment* will be more and more *debaſed*, and the intellectual *darkneſs* proportionably *increaſed*. And when, once, a man has brought himſelf to believe, in earneſt, that the great GOD of the univerſe is a *weak capricious* being, pleaſed and offended with *trifles*—That the *follies* of his creatures will attone for their *immoralities*—That the diſhonouring *human reaſon* by ſubſtituting forms, bodily geſtures, or penances, in the room of the reformation of evil habits, and inward rectitude; and practiſing little *tricks* of devotion, equally abſurd and uſeleſs—is the way in which he chooſes to be ſerved and worſhipped: when once, I ſay, a man has brought himſelf really to believe, that theſe are great and important points, in which the moſt ſubſtantial part of *religion* conſiſts, he ſeems to have loſt the *common principles* of *reaſon*. And it is no wonder to find, that *ſuperſtition*, which abounds in infinite inſtances of a like kind, is loſt in confuſion, and goes on, from one degree of folly and extravagance to another; till, in the end, it quite obliterates all *rational ſenſe* of GOD, and of his worſhip, and the very *natural conſcience* of good and evil. *Falſe notions* of GOD, the baſis and

ſupport of ſuperſtition, are *fundamental* errors; which deſtroy the *ground-work* of all *true judgment* about virtue and piety; and on which no *ſuperſtructure* can be raiſed, ſuited to the *foundation*, that has any thing in it but weakneſs and falſhood: and, therefore, while ſuch errors are unhappily entertained, it is ſcarce poſſible in nature, that any other conſequenee ſhould follow, but this—that, with reſpect to *religion*, the grand concern of life, the *light*, that is in us, will be *total darkneſs*.

If, then, we would ſhew ourſelves to be both *wiſe men*, and *good chriſtians*, let us be concerned only for *truth*; and, in order to find it out, conſider *calmly*, and examine *impartially*. Let not *indolence* enervate and ſtupify our minds: Let not *prejudice* captivate and inſlave us: Let not *ſenſuality* unfit us for intellectual exerciſes, and, by giving the command to appetite, dethrone the underſtanding, and engage it on the ſide of vice: Let not *ſuperſtition* make us weak and childiſh, and taint all our principles, with reſpect to the very eſſentials of religion, and the immutable obligations of virtue. On the contrary, let us cultivate an *honeſt* and *candid* temper, and accuſtom ourſelves, in all caſes, to make *right reaſon* the *ground*, and *teſt*, of our religion: For, by frequent *exerciſe* reaſon will be improved and exalted; the more we *conſult* it, its light will ſhine the brighter; point out, more ſtrongly, the path that leads to happineſs, and detect dangerous error, tho' lurking under the moſt ſmooth and ſpecious diſguiſes.

Whereas, if we ſuffer this *original light* to be extinguiſhed, we are, in the *firſt* place, plainly guilty of heinous *ingratitude* againſt God; by treating, with an inſolent and contemptuous indignity, the moſt noble and uſeful of all his *gifts* to mankind, the moſt eminent *prerogative* and *advantage* of their nature. We

are,

are, likewiſe, the *voluntary* inſtruments of our own *depravation*, *ſhame*, and *miſery*. We are ſunk down to a *ſordid animal* temper, to a *mere ſenſitive* life; and incur the moſt terrible of all evils, to every being endued with rational and moral capacities, *viz.* the utter deſtruction of the life of *reaſon*, the life of *purity* and internal *rectitude*, the life of GOD in man. Thus have I ſhewn what have been, in all ages, the moſt conſiderable and general *cauſes*, by which the *internal light* of *reaſon* has been obſcured, and the *judgment* corrupted and inſlaved. I now proceed

To give a ſhort account of the *corruptions* of *chriſtianity*, which was deſigned to aid and improve our *natural light*; and of the *means*, by which they have been introduced, and eſtabliſhed.—*Chriſtianity*, as it was *at firſt* propoſed to the world, was undeniably a *plain*, *intelligible*, and moſt *excellent* inſtitution; directly calcu'ated for the honour of GOD's moral government, and to promote the true dignity and welfare of mankind. It was therefore, indeed, an *uſeful*, becauſe it was a *plain* inſtitution; ſuited to *all capacities*; and deſigned to extend, its reforming and ſalutary influence, to *all ranks* and *characters*. And thus it ſtill continues, with reſpect to thoſe important principles, that properly belong to the *eſſential ſcheme* and *conſtitution* of the *goſpel*; though length of time, ignorance of ancient cuſtoms, references to uncertain facts and the peculiar idiom of a language, in many reſpects very different from thoſe of modern ages, have created, in more *remote points*, ſome incidental and immaterial obſcurities.

BUT as *reaſon* teaches that *chriſtianity*, if it be of *divine* original, muſt, in all the great branches of it, be a ſcheme eaſy to be comprehended, and explained; ſo *hiſtory*, on the other hand, informs us, that ſtrange corruptions and wild pretenſions were *very*

ſoon

ſoon graſted upon it, which roſe, by degrees, to an enormous height of *ſuperſtition* and *tyranny*. The *true ſpirit* of *papal* uſurpation began to appear, in ſome inſtances, almoſt in the *infancy* of the church; a proper *foundation* was laid, on which to erect, at a more *convenient* ſeaſon, that *ſuperſtructure* of ſplendid pride and oppreſſion; and many errors and foreign innovations were ſtrenuouſly ſupported, and blended with the *common faith* of chriſtians.

Nor is this ſo much to be wondered at, becauſe ſome diſcarding and renouncing *reaſon*, which is the only ſure guide in the explanation of *ſcripture*, and abſolutely neceſſary to ſettle the *connexion*, and *train* of argument, and ſoften *figurative* expreſſions, by reducing them to a *moderate* and *conſiſtent* ſenſe—when theſe, I ſay, adhered cloſely in all caſes to the *letter* of the text, *ſtrained* to its utmoſt rigour—whilſt others corrupted the native ſimplicity of the goſpel, by endeavouring to adapt it to their *ſeveral ſchemes* of *philoſophy*—and a third ſort, of a different turn from each of theſe, were fond of turning not only *principles*, but *facts* themſelves, into *allegory*; by which they made a ſort of *fabulous chriſtianity*, of a pretended *refined* and *myſtic* ſenſe, left to be digeſted by every man's private *prepoſſeſſion*, and ſtrength of *fancy*.

After this, by the converſion of the *Roman* emperors, *wealth* and *power* were brought into the church: and then ſtarted up *imperiouſneſs* and *faction*. Parties were formed, all eagerly graſping at *dominion*, and extremely virulent in their *oppoſition* to each other. Theſe expected to riſe, in dignity and ſplendor, by means of different *creeds*; which were uſed as the engines of ambition, and mutual oppreſſion. And, amidſt ſuch violent controverſies, many flagrant errors muſt of neceſſity have taken place; and

truth, or *falſehood*, were alternately *eſtabliſhed*, as the *ſecular power* declared itſelf. Nay, farther, *creeds* were contrived and framed, not ſo much with a view to aſcertain the *genuine* and *primitive faith* of chriſtians, as to *oppoſe* the creeds of the contrary faction: And, thereupon, *refinements* and *ſubtleties* were invented, and *unintelligible* and *barbarous phraſes* introduced, as the ſtandard of orthodox belief; by which *ſcandals* and *diviſions* were increaſed; and religion aſſumed a *new* and *ſtrange* face, utterly *unknown* to *Chriſt* and his *apoſtles*.

After this, again, when the *learning* of the times was nothing elſe, but metaphyſical evaſion and intricacy, the whole of *chriſtianity*, likewiſe, became a mere jargon of idle diſtinctions, and ſcholaſtic terms, without a meaning. It was wrapped up in clouds and darkneſs impenetrable. The chief ſtudy was, how to confound the firſt principles of *reaſon*, to render *error venerable* by a pomp of falſe learning, and reconcile the moſt flagrant *contradictions*. And when the underſtandings of the people were blinded and inſlaved, recourſe was had to *pretended and fictitious miracles*, to ſupport the prevailing ſcheme of ſuperſtition and impoſture: and theſe were uſed to eſtabliſh an *adulterate* and *ſpurious* chriſtianity in direct oppoſition to that *original*; beneficent, holy, and *divine* doctrine, which was inforced by the authority of *real* and *unqueſtionable miracles*.

Thus the caſe ſtood at the *reformation*.—But though, at that time, the *foundations* were ſomewhat cleared, and ſeveral foul *errors*, and ſcandalous inſtances of *ſuperſtition*, were wiſely and piouſly rejected by thoſe ſocieties, which, then, ſeparated from the communion of the *antichriſtian Romiſh* church; yet the pure religion of the *goſpel* continued ſtill to be too much disfigured by human

man *additions*, and clogged with abſurd and incredible *doctrines*: ſome of which are impoſſible to be reconciled with the *unity* of GOD, that firſt principle both of *natural* and *revealed* truth; others are manifeſtly inconſiſtent with his *univerſal goodneſs*, and deſire of the happineſs of all mankind; and others highly diſhonourable to the *whole moral character* of the DEITY, depreciating the immutable obligations of *virtue* and *eternal right*, and viſibly tending to an uncontrouled *licenticuſneſs*. So that *chriſtians*, in almoſt every age, have been ſo ſurpriſingly infatuated, as, according to the prediction of St. *Paul*, not *to endure ſound doctrine*: Though it is not improbable, that they have been miſled, in part, by theſe very terms; which, being *metaphorical*, muſt be capable of all the extravagant latitude of interpretation, that a luxuriant or ſenſual imagination can ſuggeſt, unleſs the true *ground*, and *reaſon*, of the metaphor be juſtly ſtated and explained. *Rational* doctrines, and *ſcriptural* doctrines, are terms which, at preſent, are not ſo apt to deceive—and yet, in truth, the other phraſe amounts to juſt the ſame with theſe; becauſe neither incomprehenſible *myſteries*, where nothing is in reality revealed, nor *irrational* doctrines, nor *immoral* doctrines, can, with any poſſible propriety, be repreſented as *ſound* doctrines: ſince the two laſt muſt of neceſſity be *depraved* and *miſchievous*; and the firſt are *harmleſs* indeed, as they are not capable of being *underſtood*, nor, conſequently, of having any influence at all upon *practice*, but they are, for the ſame reaſon, utterly *inſignificant* and *unprofitable*.—He alone, who has a *clear* and *well-informed*, can be ſaid to be a man of a *ſound*, *underſtanding*: He alone, who draws *right* concluſions from *ſolid* principles, is a man of a *ſound judgment*: He only, who is *honeſt*, *impartial*, and *open* to conviction, is a perſon of a *ſound heart*.—And ſo, likewiſe, none but they, who conſent to *wholeſome words*,

that have a direct tendency to refine and perfect the *reaſon* of a man, and improve *virtue*, which is the health, and life, and vigour of the human ſoul, can, with any appearance of truth or juſtice, aſſume to themſelves the character of being *ſound in the faith*.

I SHALL conclude with obſerving, that there is not only a ſtrong obligation upon us to avoid the *cauſes* of intellectual darkneſs, and the *errors*, above mentioned, not only as we are the *reaſonable* creatures of GOD; not only as we are *chriſtians*, to whom the doctrines, and duties, of true religion are more clearly and fully made known; but from the regard which we ought to bear to *poſterity*: becauſe the *ſentiments* which prevail in *one age*, be they right or wrong, uſeful or miſchievous, are naturally *transferred* to *another*. The opinions of the generality, are found by experience, to be *adapted*, for the moſt part, to thoſe of their immediate *anceſtors*. One *dark* age is almoſt always, in the hiſtory of the world, followed by another *equal* to, if not *exceeding* it in *darkneſs*. And, in more private life, the *errors* of parents too certainly *deſcend* to their children. On the other hand, when *knowledge*, and *ingenuity*, and *honeſt free diſquiſition*, begin to *ſpread* themſelves, the *next* generation is likely to be *more wiſe* and *inquiſitive*. If therefore we are careful to improve, in our own mind, the light of *reaſon*, and the light of *chriſtianity*, we may fairly expect, judging by what has hitherto been the actual courſe of things, that our *good principles* will be conveyed, as a ſort of an inheritance, to thoſe who *directly ſucceed* us; and, perhaps, have an influence on more *remote* and *diſtant* times.

DIS-

DISCOURSE III.

Of the nature, *and* true principle, *of* honour.

THERE is nothing of greater importance, towards the right conduct of life, than fixing *true principles* of action, and thoroughly underſtanding their *nature*, and extent; and yet nothing, in which mankind are more groſly and univerſally defective. This is the foundation of moſt of their errors in practice; of an *abſurd* and *inconſiſtent* behaviour; a *partial unſteady* virtue; and, too frequently, of the greateſt *irregularities* and *diſorders*. And as long as they take up their opinions, juſt as *cuſtom*, and the *chance* of the times direct; if, inſtead of conſulting their reaſon, *fancy* and *paſſion* are ſuffered to have the chief influence, even in ſettling the ſtandard of right and wrong, and fixing their moſt ſacred principles—how can it be otherwiſe? What can be expected, but a *whimſical unconnected* ſcheme of morals, and, conſequently, the utmoſt confuſion?

WHILE *baſe* and *vicious* principles, *only*, are entertained, the mind muſt be intirely corrupted; and the abuſe of *good* ones will neceſ-

neceſſarily prevent their natural effect, in proportion as they are perverted; and may lead men into moſt extravagant and dangerous purſuits, of pernicious conſequence to themſelves, and extremely injurious to ſociety.

THIS is in nothing more viſible, than in the notion of *honour*, which, in itſelf, is a truly *ſublime* and *generous* principle, and one of the ſureſt *guards* of virtue, and of the liberty and happineſs of mankind: But when it is debaſed into a mere *name*, into a *fantaſtical* and *arbitrary* thing; when it is conſidered as *diſtinct* from probity, juſtice, and benevolence; when it is not an *uniform* principle, influencing, *equally*, to *every branch* of a worthy, and truly honourable, behaviour: What *good* can be expected from it? Nay, what *miſchiefs* has it not, in all ages, occaſioned? And we have reaſon to apprehend, judging by the natural tendencies of things, the ſame *diſorders* from it, in all future times. For as certainly as *true honour* inſpires great and noble deſigns, ſupports our characters as men, ſtrengthens the obligations of ſocial virtue, and reſtrains from mean and unwarrantable actions; *falſe honour* will firſt cloud and then totally extinguiſh, our ſenſe of good and evil, and betray us into ſuch methods of conduct, as are not barely inconſiſtent with all *good morals*, but *vile* and *infamous*.

WHAT then, it will be aſked, is the *true notion* of *honour*? In order to ſtate this aright, we muſt fix on ſome *rule*, by which it may be certainly known, when particular actions, or a courſe of action, are *honourable*, or the *contrary*. For if we have no *ſtandard* of *honour*, the word muſt be an amuſing empty *ſound*, to which we have no *idea*; and if it be *arbitrary*, *uncertain* and *variable*, we ſhall be altogether at as great a loſs about it; becauſe

the notion of it will be *different* as often as cuſtoms, opinions, and fancies alter: And the very ſame things may be *honourable* in *one* age, and country, and *diſhonourable* in *another*. Since, therefore, *true honour* muſt have its foundation in *nature*, and, in order to its being a *wiſe* and *rational*, be, likewiſe, a *ſteady* and *immutable* principle; the queſtion juſtly returns, *viz.* What is the *rule*, by which we are to *judge* of it?

I ANSWER in general, that a being acts *honourably*, when its conduct is ſuch, in all the various ſcenes of its exiſtence, as is *becoming* its nature, and character in the univerſe, and *perfective* of its nobleſt faculties. And in every inſtance, in which it acts *contrary* to the *end* of its creation, and *beneath* what may reaſonably be expected from it, it *ſinks* and *debaſes* its true worth, and renders itſelf, proportionably, *mean* and *ignominious*. This may be applied, to every order of intelligent beings. 'And, with reſpect 'to *mankind* particularly, *true honour* is nothing elſe, but acting 'up to the *importance* and *dignity* of human nature; and they 'bring a *reproach* upon it, and *leſſen* its *value* in themſelves, 'whenever they fall ſhort of this; and, conſequently, act in ſuch 'a manner, as *men* ought to be *aſhamed* of. The *difference* of the 'circumſtances will make no *alteration*, at all, in this general rule. 'For we are only to conſider, in every *ſtation*, and under every 'difference of *character* and *advantages*, how it is fit and proper 'for *men* to behave, and what are their *peculiar* obligations and 'duties: And if they *fulfill* theſe, they ſupport the *honour* of 'their nature, ſecure the *approbation* of their own minds, and 'merit the *applauſe* of their fellow creatures; if the contrary, 'they act *meanly* and *diſhonourably*.'

It is abſolutely neceſſary, therefore, in order to maintain a juſt and conſiſtent ſenſe of *honour*, that we be convinced of the *excellency* of human nature, and conceive of it, as ſomething *ſublime* and *generous*. This will bear us up above all *little ſordid* views, and lead to *great* and *god-like* actions. Whereas if we entertain *low* and *contemptible* notions of it, and repreſent it as having nothing *amiable* and *worthy* in it, and as a *compound* of mean-ſpiritedneſs, ill-nature, treachery, and of narrow ſelfiſh paſſions; we deſtroy all the *ſeeds* of *honour*, and every *motive* and *incitement* to it.

But this account may, perhaps, be thought too general. Let us therefore examine, more particularly, wherein the *dignity* of human nature conſiſts, that we may form a more clear and determinate idea of a praiſe-worthy, and *honourable* behaviour. Human nature, then, is compoſed of *two* principles, the *rational*, and the *ſenſitive*; or, in other words, of *reaſon* as the *governing* principle, and of various *affections*, *inſtincts* and *paſſions*, all planted in it for wiſe and uſeful purpoſes, but which are apt to be *irregular*, and create great *confuſion* in the world, if they are not reſtrained and controuled. As *reaſon*, therefore, is the chief *prerogative* of our nature, and what *exalts* us, highly, above the rank of mere *animals*; it muſt be the chief *glory* of mankind to act in all caſes *reaſonably*, and keep the inferior principles in due *ſubordination*; and in proportion as reaſon is *depreſſed*, human nature is *diſhonoured*, and *degraded*. Thus much, then, is undeniable, that it is impoſſible for any man to have the leaſt *true ſenſe* of *honour*, who, inſtead of *cultivating* the rational part, is a *ſlave* to brutiſh and diſorderly appetites. And, on the contrary, it is as impoſſible for him to *miſs* of it, if he follows the conduct of reaſon; 'which

'recom-

'recommends, and approves of, nothing, but what is *honourable*, 'to his nature, to his particular character, *honourable* in all ſtates 'and circumſtances; and directs to every thing that is *great* and '*heroical*, in its utmoſt perfection.'

We may proceed one ſtep farther, and add to what has been already ſaid, that *true honour* conſiſts only in *virtue*. The brighteſt natural endowments are only ſo far *ornamental*, as they are *ſubſervient* to this. The moſt exalted *underſtanding*, the greateſt ſtrength of *judgment* and *eloquence*, *firmneſs* and *intrepidity* of mind, may appear *ſingly*, and ſometimes *all-together*, in characters that are, upon the whole, *ſhameful*, and *deteſtable*. 'And why?— 'Becauſe there is wanting that principal *ingredient*, to conſtitute '*true honour*, *probity* of heart and *rectitude* of manners.' But there is not one branch of *virtue*, that has not a *native excellency* in it, which all the conſiderate part of the world eſteem and celebrate; and not a ſingle inſtance of *vice* can be named, but what *ſtains* and *blemiſhes* our *rank* as men in every *ſtation* and *order* of human life.

While violent and tyrannous paſſions bear ſway, the whole human frame is *deformed* and *out of order*; all its original *beauty* is loſt; all the lively traces and ſignatures of the admirable *wiſdom*, and *goodneſs*, of its maker are, in a great meaſure *obſcured*. 'And could we ſuppoſe a nation, ever ſo much *poliſhed* in out-'ward *forms*, and that had cultivated the *liberal arts* to their ut-'moſt *perfection*, but yet were ignorant of God, and regardleſs 'of the honour and duty which they owed to him; or, diſſolved 'in luxury; or, faithleſs and oppreſſive; in a word, of looſe and 'profligate morals; we muſt conſider them but as a kind of '*civilized barbarians*.' And the ſame may be ſaid with reſpect

to particular perſons. For it is virtue alone, that *refines* human life; it is this alone, that can ſupport the *honour* of *high ſtations* and *characters*; it is this alone, that renders both our natural accompliſhments, and external advantages, truly *worthy* and *ornamental*.

But there are *ſome virtues*, that have a peculiar beauty and *nobleneſs* attending them; and which are, therefore, juſtly eſteemed the *higheſt pitch* of *honour*, that human nature is capable of—'Such, for inſtance, are all acts of *diſintereſted benevolence*; a 'man ſacrificing his *life*, rather than ſubmitting to any thing, 'that has the *appearance* of *meanneſs* and *infamy*; daring to be '*ſingularly good*, in times of general corruption and degeneracy, 'againſt authority, cuſtom, intereſt, all on the ſide of *vice*; and 'every inſtance of behaving well in *nice* and *critical* circum-'ſtances, where there are the ſtrongeſt *temptations* to act wicked-'ly, and nothing *reſtrains* but the love of virtue for itſelf, and a 'high ſenſe of its intrinſic merit and dignity.'

These are, all, certain indications of a *great* mind; and if we compare, with them, the contrary vices, they muſt of neceſſity appear *low* and *infamous*. Compare, for example, *covetouſneſs* with a *diffuſive charity*, that ſpreads relief and happineſs all around it; a *narrow mercenary* diſpoſition, with an ardent and generous *zeal* for the *public* welfare; how *baſe* and *ſordid* a thing is it, and how muſt it *ſink* us, in the opinion of all mankind? What a *little* figure do we make, when the fear of *reproach*, or an apprehenſion of ſome threatning *danger*, ſo breaks our ſpirits, that we have not *reſolution* enough to aſſert the honour of our maker, and the immutable ties of reaſon and religion; in compariſon of him, who *ſteadily adheres* to the ſacred cauſe of truth and

and virtue, amidſt the greateſt *difficulties?* This all, even the *diſhonourable* guilty, ſeem to be aware of; and, therefore, indeavour to ſcreen themſelves under ſomething, that makes a more *plauſible* and *creditable* appearance. Avarice muſt paſs for *frugality*, and cowardice for *prudence*. For theſe vices are ſuch undoubted evidences of an *abject groveling* ſpirit, that without putting *falſe colours* upon them, and *diſguiſing* their natural baſeneſs and ignominy, it is hardly poſſible, beſides the contempt we ſhall meet with from *others*, but we muſt alſo be aſhamed, and out of conceit with *ourſelves*.

We ſee then, upon the whole, 'that as *virtue*, and *amiable-* 'neſs and *beauty* of action, ſo *virtue*, and *honour* are always in- 'ſeparable.' And, indeed, unleſs we allow what I have now offered, to be the *true notion* of *honour*, it muſt be a thing intirely *fantaſtical*. And if this be the caſe; if the *humour* of the times, nay, perhaps, *vice* itſelf be left to ſettle the *ſtandard* of it; it muſt be utterly *unworthy* any man's regard, but for his own private convenience, and intereſt——And is not this now a *worthy* idea of *honour*, which many perſons are ſo fond of to the diſparagement of *virtue* itſelf, to reſolve it wholly into *opinion*, *prejudice*, and *arbitrary determination?* Is it not, in reality, a ſhameful and melancholy *abuſe* of one of the moſt *ſublime* and *uſeful* motives, by which mankind can be influenced?—Now from the foregoing account it appears,

First, that *true honour* is an *univerſal* principle. 'It is not 'confined to any particular *order*, or *character*; but what the 'whole *ſpecies* are concerned in.' Indeed, perſons of *high* birth, and of a *liberal polite* education, and thoſe, whoſe ſtations place them in an *eminent* and *conſpicuous* point of view, may well be

expected to have a greater *delicacy* of *taſte*, and *nicer* ſentiments of *honour* than the rude uncultivated multitude. Their *ſuperior* rank in life ſhould give their minds an *elevated* turn, and make them *deſpiſe* all low and ſordid views. And if perſons, ſo *diſtinguiſhed*, act meanly and ungenerouſly; they become, in the opinion of all wiſe men, much more *deſpicable* than the *baſeſt* of their *dependents*. 'But the matter is carried much too far, when 'they ingroſs *all honour* to themſelves, and ſuppoſe the reſt of the 'world to be *incapable* of it: Becauſe the firſt and moſt ſacred '*tie* of *honour* is, a regard to the *dignity* of *human nature*; 'which is an *univerſal* obligation.' And the encouraging and promoting it in *all*, who are endued with *rational* faculties, muſt be of the greateſt ſervice to *virtue*; while the contrary method of proceeding has a direct tendency, to *ſink* the inferior part of mankind yet *lower*, and *tie* them down to *mean* and *groveling* conceptions; and, conſequently, is not only *unjuſt*, but a piece of *ill-policy* too, that will be avoided by all wiſe ſocieties, which have a true notion of their own intereſt. Particular circumſtances and ſtations may indeed, as has been already hinted, afford *ſpecial incentives* to *honour*, but the *principle itſelf* belongs to human nature: And though a man be ſtripped of his *titles*, and of every mark of outward *diſtinction*, yet, if he retains the *firmneſs* and *conſtancy*, the *greatneſs* and *generoſity*, of his mind, he is ſtill *as honourable* as ever; and the *more ſo*, for preſerving a *dignity* and *ſuperiority* of ſpirit in the *change* of his *fortune*, and under all his *diſgraces*. Nay, the hiſtory of every age has afforded *ſome* examples of this *heroic* virtue, in very *low* life; of a *ſcrupulous* and *inflexible juſtice*, of *generous gratitude*, and *friendſhip*, of an *integrity*, that no temptations could *corrupt*. 'And, in the judg-'ment of impartial reaſon, theſe are the perſons of *noble* diſpoſitions,

'ons, and of the moſt *ſtrict* and *delicate honour*; and all who 'are of *proud*, *inſolent*, *mercenary*, and *avaricious* tempers, what-'ever their *preferments*, and enſigns of *external dignity* may be, 'are *vile*, and, to the laſt degree, *contemptible*.' But,

SECONDLY, As *true honour* is an *univerſal*, it appears likewiſe, from the account which has been given of it, that it is an *uniform* principle: 'I mean, that it will not be confined to ſome *particular* '*branches* of a *right* and *worthy* behaviour; but carry us on to '*every thing*, that is really *great*, and *generous*, and *honourable* to-'human nature.' For inſtance, if *juſtice*, a ſtrict obſervance of our *promiſes* and *engagements*, if *patriotiſm*, or an ardent concern and zeal for the *public good*, if *benevolence*, be *honourable* in *any one*, they muſt be ſo in *every* caſe, without *exception*. So that he, who is extremely punctual in paying, what he imagines to be, *debts* of *honour*, but wilfully and oppreſſively *detains*, from his more *honeſt* and *induſtrious* neighbours, what is their undoubted *right* both by law and equity; and he, who ſcruples to invade his neighbour's *ſubſtance*, but violates the honour of his *bed*; who is faithful to his *friend*, but a traitor to his *country* (and the ſame muſt be true, of every other inſtance of like partial and inconſiſtent conduct) ſuch perſons, I ſay, can have no *juſt ſenſe* of what is worthy and excellent, nor ſcarce a *ſpark* of *true honour* ſubſiſting in their minds. What they call *their honour* is a *looſe*, *undetermined*, *variable* thing; that, in caſes of *exigency*, cannot be depended on, nor truſted to.

AND, indeed, men of this taſte ſeem to be conſcious of *a failure* in the more *ſolid* parts; and are, therefore, apt to place their chief merit in a *noble* deſcent, or alliance, in the *antiquity* of their families,

lies, or in their *titles*. And I would, by no means, be thought to diſcourage the appointing outward *honours*, and *emblems* of *diſtinction*, as *rewards* of brave qualities, and public virtue. But, ſurely, theſe alone do not conſtitute true *dignity*. On the contrary, when the worthleſs and undeſerving are loaded with *honours*, they ſerve but to *expoſe*, in a ſtronger light, their demerit and infamy. And the *titles* that deſcend, from *brave* and *illuſtrious* anceſtors, to one that has loſt their *virtue*, and has no tincture of their *heroic ſpirit*, are a *burden* upon *him*, and render his imperfections more glaringly *ridiculous*.—But it may perhaps be thought a point of *decency*, not to inſiſt more particularly on this; and, beſides, it is intirely needleſs in itſelf; ſince I am perſuaded, that there is ſcarce any one, of a ſound underſtanding, but will readily allow, that nothing can properly ſupport the grandeur of any character, where there are wanting noble *diſpoſitions* of mind, and *a life* of true and ſtrict honour.

I SHALL only add, that it is the ſame kind of *falſe honour*, which has fixed it as a mark of *politeneſs*, for men not only to *act* worſe than *beſtial* diſorders; but to *affect* the *reputation* of vices, which they never committed—Which has determined *private affronts* to be *capital* crimes, not to be *expiated* but by the *blood* of the offender —that has *dared* to repreſent pride and revenge as *heroic* virtues; and, having thus *inflamed* theſe mercileſs paſſions, has made numbers of diſconſolate *widows*, and helpleſs *orphans*, ruined particular *families*, and oftentimes diſtreſſed the *public*—and that by referring it to private *ſubjects*, to *redreſs* their own grievances, and both to *judge* and *puniſh* offences, tends to the utter ſubverſion of all *government*, of all *order*, and *civil ſociety*.—And, finally, it is this moſt *pernicious* and *unnatural* principle, that has produced the *ſpurious*

hateful brood of *tyrants*, *oppreſſors*, *perſecutors*, and *mad violent heroes*; who are eternal *enemies* to liberty, and to the peace of the world; and *plunder* and *deſtroy* their fellow-creatures, in defiance of juſtice and humanity. Theſe indeed, through the unaccountable *prejudice* of the world, are frequently celebrated as *great* characters: But for what are they *eminent*—unleſs it be for the *greatneſs*, the *enormous ſize* of their guilt and infamy? If trophies of *honour* may be raiſed upon ſo baſe and deteſtable a foundation, *honour* muſt be an *enemy* to human nature; and at irreconcilable *variance* with every thing that is amiable, praiſe-worthy, and uſeful.

DIS-

DISCOURSE IV.

An eſtimate, *and* defence, *of human life.*

KNow *thyſelf*—was, of old, a celebrated leſſon of *philoſophy*, received and enforced as *a divine oracle*. And there is, undoubtedly, a ſenſe in which it might be ſo ſtiled with propriety, *viz.* as it is a dictate of natural and undepraved *reaſon*, the *original law* of GOD; and a *fundamental* and moſt *important* principle, in the ſtudy and practice of *morality*.

BUT then, in order to render it thus eminently uſeful, we muſt extend and inlarge its meaning beyond the more *obvious* and *ſtrict* ſignification of the words, and what, perhaps, is *commonly thought* to be included in them; we muſt not confine this noble maxim to a bare *acquaintance* with a man's own *perſonal character*, but take in the ſtudy of *human nature* itſelf, and of *human life*. Thus to *know thyſelf*, with reſpect to thy rank, importance, and dignity, as *a man*; the excellence and advantages of thy *peculiar frame*; the ultimate *deſign* of thy *creation*; the *circumſtances* in which thou art *placed*; the *views* with which thou art to act; and, in a word, the *nature* and *proper duties* of thy preſent ſituation, and the *juſt grounds*

grounds of thine expectations, with reſpect to a future exiſtence: this is the ſource and ſpring of all *moral* knowledge, and, in a great meaſure, of all *divine* knowledge too. For the notions we entertain of GOD, of his eſſential *attributes*, and *original plan* of creation and moral government, will naturally correſpond with the ideas, we frame, of *our own ſtate* and *character*. And, accordingly, we ſhall either honour him as *a father*; or dread him as *a tyrant*; we ſhall either yield an *ingenuous* and *chearful* homage to him, from a ſincere veneration, and lively ſenſe of gratitude; or ſerve him with a *reluctant ſullen* temper, and a ſuperſtitious *horror*.

BUT though right ſentiments, as to this great point, be ſo highly deſirable, and of the utmoſt conſequence to virtue, religion, and the true happineſs of mankind; yet, as if theſe objects were too *near* us, to be *diſtinctly* and *clearly* diſcerned, we are, in ſcarce any thing more ſuperficial and confuſed, than in our *views* and *conceptions* of human nature. We enter, but ſeldom, into a particular examination of *our make*, and the *ſtate* in which we are. We ſeldom conſider what the *difficulties* and *inconveniencies* of it are; how they may be *avoided*, or *leſſened*, or, by what methods, our *advantages* may be improved. Here looſe and indigeſted notions ſuffice us.—Or, elſe, our judgment is in a great degree *conſtitutional*, or ſprings from *prejudice*, and *intemperance* of paſſion.—And hence proceed the various and contradictory deſcriptions, which are ſo often given of the preſent ſcene of things: ſome *approving*, and others *condemning* it; ſome *praiſing* the author of it, and others *blaſpheming* him; or *reproaching* his *wiſdom* and *goodneſs*, by their impatience and diſcontent.

And yet moſt certainly there *is*, and *muſt be* (we may fairly preſume, from what we ſee of the exquiſite contrivance and univerſal goodneſs of the Creator, that there *is* and *muſt be*) ſome general *preciſe idea* and *character* to which all the *diſtinctions* and *orders*, that obtain in human life, may be properly *reduced*; ſome *idea* that is *common* to it, throughout all its diverſities of rank and circumſtance; with which the high and low, the deſpiſed and honourable, the bright and dark, ſcenes of it have an evident *connection*; and help indeed to *fill it up*, and make it a *conſiſtent* idea, or a ſcheme *worthy* of infinite wiſdom. But we plainly ſee, that it cannot be ſtiled, univerſally, a *happy*, or a *miſerable*, life; not abſolutely, a ſtate of moral *improvement*, nor of *defection* and *degeneracy*. It does not appear to be a ſtate *adequate* to the natural faculties of mankind, and yielding the *ſublimeſt* employments and pleaſures, of which they are, by their ſuperior conſtitution, *capable*; nor, conſequently, to be a ſtate, that is *entire* within itſelf, and without any *relation* to futurity.

How then ſhall we form a right *eſtimate* of it? Why the brief account, that has been already given, of what it *is not*, affords ſome light to us, by which we may fix what it *really* is. And if we carry our reflexions further, the evidence will gradually increaſe, till it riſes to as high a degree of probability, as, from the nature of the thing itſelf, can be deſired.

For that mankind are endued with *reaſonable* and *moral* powers, and, conſequently, capable of being *governed* by laws; that they are, from their creation, *dependent* beings, and immutably *ſubject* to the authority of God; that they have one unalterable, and univerſal,

ſal, *law* of their nature; that the *wiſdom* of the divine *government* requires in general, the diſtribution of *rewards* and *puniſhments*, upon the ſame foundation, on which they are admitted in all *other governments*; and, yet, that there is no ſuch recompence *fixed*, *conſtant*, and *viſible* in this life; or *proportioned* to the ſeveral different degrees of mens virtue and vice, as natural *equity* and the *ends* of government demand; but, on the contrary, that there are innumerable inſtances, in which *integrity* and *goodneſs* are inſulted and degraded, and loaded with heavy calamities, while *iniquity* and *oppreſſion* exult and triumph; nay, numberleſs inſtances, where the *moſt vicious* are, to outward appearance, leſs miſerable, than perſons of much *inferior* guilt, and the *moſt virtuous* leſs happy, than others of far *inferior* virtue; and, to ſum up all, that there are even caſes, where *vice* is moſt honoured, when it is moſt *infamous*, and *virtue* treated with greater diſgrace and indignity, becauſe it is *generous* and *inflexible*; in direct oppoſition, if *finally* permitted by any government, to every poſſible maxim of *wiſdom*, *juſtice*, and *benevolence*; the whole of this, I ſay, is undeniable *truth*, evident to the common reaſon of men, or undeniable *fact*; confirmed by the experience of all ages. And from this chain of propoſitions, what is the direct and fair concluſion, but that human life is a *probationary* ſcene, and the preſent world a ſtate of *diſcipline*, framed for the exerciſe, growth, and refinement of our virtues!—It looks not, in any reſpect, like the *conſummation* of human life, but, in all, like a ſcheme for *initiation*, *advancement*; and *confirmation* in moral rectitude. And, accordingly, things are ſo adjuſted, and maintained in an unvaried courſe; that, by reaſon of the different *relations*, *orders*, and *dependencies*, and a vaſt variety of *incidents* and *changes*, which frequently occur, there is full ſcope for the *trial* of *every temper*; and for all *divine*, *ſocial*, and *human*

virtues, to diſplay themſelves in their utmoſt dignity and luſtre. Thus then we have found an *idea* of human life, that is truly, and ſtrictly, *characteriſtical*; and the *only one*, that is ſo: ſince no other general idea correſponds to it *univerſally*; nor *equally* and *uniformly* ſuits all degrees and conditions in it; nor deſcribes the *deſign* of it *throughout*.

But this *general knowledge*, alone, is not ſufficient, to ſilence the cavils of *ſcepticiſm*, or the peeviſh murmurs of *diſcontent*. Men are ſtill inclined to *complain* of their ſituation, and *arraign* the conduct of providence. They ſeem to think it hard, that their virtue muſt be improved by *laborious exerciſe*; that there is need of *vigilance*, and *circumſpection*; that there are *difficulties* to be encountered; ſtrong *paſſions* to be controuled; and ſo many *temptations*, of various kinds, ſoliciting to vice and diſorder. In a word, they are for a ſort of *eaſy indolent* goodneſs, that will grow and thrive *of itſelf*; and think themſelves *ill uſed*, in not being permitted to enjoy all the *rewards* annexed to virtue, without its being *tried*, whether they are virtuous from the *happineſs* of their conſtitution, and the *want* of temptations to a contrary conduct, or from their own deliberate *choice*, and *reſolution*.

And, in this humour of finding fault, every *diſcouragment* is exaggerated to the utmoſt pitch: No diſtinction is made between the *natural* hardſhips, and *unavoidable* temptations, which attend human life; and thoſe which *ill-cuſtom*, and a *voluntary corruption* of manners, have introduced; in direct *oppoſition* to the firſt eſtabliſhed *order* of things. Let the *cauſes* of them be what they will, they have but little influence in determining our general judg-

judgment: We forget to enquire into the real *ſprings* and *occaſions* of vice; to *examine* ourſelves, and *cenſure* our own errors; but throw the *reproach* and *blame* of all upon the almighty.

But let us ſuppoſe, that any one of us had been formed, *at firſt*, with all the *mental powers* of a man, in what we may call a ſtate of *perfection*; *i. e.* mature in *underſtanding* and with a *judgment* as clear and as ſolid, as if it had been corrected, and improved, by a long courſe of impartial and juſt *reflexion*. Let this perſon who, (we may likewiſe ſuppoſe, to render the caſe more pertinent and inſtructive) is *diſſatisfied* with the ſcheme of providence, in the *preſent order* and *diſpoſition* of human life; let him, I ſay, have been conſulted, about the *future condition* of his own exiſtence; and told that the ſtate, intended for him, was not one of abſolute *ſecurity* and *eſtabliſhment* in goodneſs, but of *trial*, in which, his virtue would be entirely owing to his own free *choice*, and acquire degrees of *ſtrength* and *ſtability*, only in proportion to his care and diligence; that the conſequence of *abuſing* his rational powers, and *corrupting* the temper of his mind by vicious habits, would be a very *ſevere puniſhment* in another life, commenſurate to the demerit of his offences; but, that if he behaved *well*, becoming his *nature*, and the particular *ſtation* aſſigned him, he would be raiſed to an *immortal life* of complete *rectitude*, and *happineſs*: Let us ſuppoſe him to have been informed further, that his *ſtate* of *trial* might be, in a great meaſure, *moderated* and *fixed* by *himſelf*, ſo as to *ſhorten* the courſe of *labour* and *conflict*, and *remove* many of the *difficulties* that would otherwiſe attend it; to render the ways of virtue more *ſmooth* and *pleaſant*, and the temptations to vice leſs *powerful*, and *dangerous*; and to make it *highly probable*, even to his own judgment, that he would *triumph*,

at length, over all *oppoſition*—If the matter had been thus ſtated and propoſed, even to one of *a critical* and *capticus* temper, *before* the ſtate of his being was unavoidably determined, what *judgment*, do we think, he would have paſſed upon *the whole?* Would he not have been inclined to look upon it, as an *eligible* ſtate, a *fair* and *promiſing* proſpect of happineſs? And is it not an *exact* and *true picture* of human life? It certainly is, in the moſt *material ſketches* of it: And *every man* that *ever had*, by the wiſe appointment of providence, his ſituation aſſigned him in the preſent world, has had it in *his power*, depending upon *himſelf* in a very conſiderable degree, to *frame* and *adjuſt* his own circumſtances, with reſpect both to *inward propenſities*, and the *external probabilities* of virtue and vice—Which the following brief obſervations will, I believe, unanſwerably prove.

FIRST, that thoſe, who, from their *firſt entrance* upon *intelligent* and *moral life*, have conducted themſelves with *ſedate thought*, and managed with *deliberation* and *prudence*, muſt, of neceſſity, be delivered from innumerable *ſnares* and *hazards*, which perſons of a *contrary* character, are, from the ſettled conſtitution of the world, and the natural courſe of human affairs, expoſed to. And their probationary ſtate muſt, of conſequence, be vaſtly *altered* from what it either *would*, or *could*, have been, had they been of a *blind*, *giddy*, *roving* diſpoſition; and, in all their meaſures, *raſh* and *incautious*. And the *advantages* for the purſuit and attainment of *virtue*, reſulting from this *change* (which is principally to be aſcribed to their own *wiſdom*, and *ſelf-determination*) muſt be greatly *ſuperior* to what the other can enjoy; as the exerciſe of *diſcretion* tends to procure *eaſe* in outward circumſtances, and *freedom* and *compoſure* of mind: which render all mankind *better*

fitted

fitted for calm conſideration, and *facilitate* the conqueſt of licentious paſſions.

AGAIN, a habit of *induſtry*, and *frugality*, will render the probationary condition of man, in many inſtances, intirely *different* from what it muſt *otherwiſe be*, if he was abandoned to *ſloth* and *prodigality*. He will, by this means, enjoy *more opportunities* for cultivating, and exerting, ſome of the *ſublimeſt* and moſt *generous* virtues; and meet with *fewer difficulties*, to *oppreſs* his ſpirits, and *enervate* his inward conſtitution; and *fewer temptations* (which are generally found, in the unhappy circumſtances of the *ſlothful* and the *prodigal*, to have too prevailing and total an influence) to *baſeneſs* and *injuſtice*.

ADD to this, that an early habit of *reſolution* will *leſſen* the difficulty of our ſtate of tryal upon the whole, by fortifying the *temper*; inſpiring *vigour* and *activity*; and diminiſhing the *apprehenſions of danger*, which frequently ſo *enſlave* and *intimidate*, as to make us yield ourſelves up as *vanquiſhed*, before we have ſufficiently *proved* our *ſtrength*. And, accordingly, we know from experience, that, by an eſtabliſhed and lively *reſolution*, ſuch difficulties are with eaſe *ſurmounted*, as to *weak* and *fluctuating* minds, are, generally ſpeaking, *inſuperable*.

THE LAST remark, which I ſhall make, is, that as it is in *our power*, by the methods already mentioned, to *alter* and *amend* this our probationary ſtate; ſo, likewiſe, by acquiring *early habits* of piety and univerſal virtue, to *ſhorten* I had almoſt ſaid, the *term* and *duration*, but, I may at leaſt ſay, the *ſeverity* and *rigour* of it. So that we may juſtly make this inference from the whole, that

that the warm exclamations, which thoſe who have no true notion of themſelves, nor reverence of their maker, are apt to vent againſt *human life* in general—as a *grievous* and *oppreſſive* ſcene, cloged with *incumberances* and planted thick with *dangers*, and rendering the *attainment* of happineſs next to *impracticable*—ought to be regarded, as the over-flowings of *ſpleen* and *paſſion* only, and not as the language of *nature* and *truth*.

DIS-

DISCOURSE V.

Of ſelf-government; *and the duty of* ſelf-denial.

THE duty, which I now treat of, is the *neceſſary foundation* of a virtuous practice, and of all private and publick happineſs—For unleſs we have ſome *command* over ourſelves, and hold our appetites and paſſions under a proper *regulation*, it is abſolutely impoſſible, that we ſhould purſue the *perfection* of our reaſonable nature; or diſcharge thoſe neceſſary *duties*, ariſing from the eternal reaſon of things, which we owe to GOD, and to *one another*. From *a defect* in this point, ſpring almoſt all the errors and misfortunes *of private life*; and infinite injuries accrue likewiſe to *ſocieties*, and the *civil intereſts* of mankind. Nor is it poſſible in nature that it ſhould be otherwiſe, it being equally abſurd to expect, while men are careleſs about their inward *temper*, and corrupt and miſchievous *diſpoſitions* are indulged and cheriſhed in the heart, a virtuous, honourable, or beneficent conduct; as that order ſhould *directly* ſpring from confuſion, or good from evil.

Now the main ſubſtance of a regular ſelf-government conſiſts in this, that we maintain a conſtant watch over our thoughts, that they may be always *rightly* imployed with reſpect to external ob-

jects, and the various occurrences of life; and take care, that the passions be kept in due *subordination*, and all the affections *pure* and *well-disciplined*: This, I say, is the principal part of that inward *government*, which religion directs to, because it is the basis and foundation of all the rest; and where it is wanting, we can neither expect a *clear* understanding, nor a *sound* heart, or that regard will be paid to the sacred dictates of *reason*, *honour*, or *conscience*.

It is absolutely necessary, as the fundamental point of all, that our *passions* be directed towards *proper* objects: 'That we *love* only 'what is *truly lovely*, and *desire* nothing, but what is *really desire-* 'able, nor *hate* any thing, but what is a just object of *aversion*.' For the *imaginary* notions, which men frame of good and evil, are one chief occasion of false *hopes*, and *fears*, of unreasonable *fondnesses* and groundless *aversions*; and, in short, of all the *wildness* and *extravagancy* of the affections, and the *shame* and *misery*, which they suffer in consequence of it. Thus it comes to pass, that pomp and temporal honour, equipage, riches, and sensual pleasures, which, at best, are but *superfluities*, or mere *exterior decorations* of life (but frequently unnatural and hurtful excrescencies that require pruning, to preserve the health and vigour of the mind) instead of being regarded under their proper characters, engage our whole *attention* and *pursuit*. From the same wrong judgment, men are led to *dread*, and consequently to *fly from*, poverty, contempt, and worldly reproach, as the worst of *evils*; and stick not even at *vicious* practices, to avoid what they are thus *immoderately* frighted at the prospect of, to the shame of their *reason*, and the forfeiture of their inward *peace*. So that nothing is more intimately connected with the true *government* of the *passions*, as a necessary means of preserving *rectitude* and *probity* of heart, than forming an exact and impartial *estimate* of the natural

tural value and differences of things.—This will prevent their being fixed on *unſuitable* and *unworthy* objects; and, which is a point that equally demands our care, their being *exceſſive* either in *degree* or *duration*. We ſhall neither *ſubſtitute* inferior enjoyments in the place of the *ſupreme good*; nor be *betrayed* by imaginary, baſe, inſlaving *errors*, to violate our duty, and the obedience we owe to the ſupreme governor of mankind. We ſhall neither ſuffer *a falſe ſhame* to diſpirit and baffle our reſolution; nor allow ourſelves to indulge *reſentment* beyond the *real demerit* of the offence and injury, that is offered us. Our paſſions will not be permitted to riſe to ſuch a *height*, or tranſport ſo *violently*, as to deſtroy the *calmneſs* and *compoſure* of our temper, and ſettle in an habitual *rage* and *perturbation* of ſpirit: Nor ſhall we be ſo far *immerſed* in ſenſual exceſſes, as to *debaſe* and *weaken* our more noble faculties, or *incroach* on thoſe ſublime contemplations and exerciſes, which *properly belong to us* as reaſonable beings.

We are not, indeed, obliged entirely to *extirpate* the paſſions; for this is *impoſſible:* Since they are *interwoven* with our very frame and conſtitution. Nay, ſuch an attempt would be *impious*; as it reproaches the *wiſdom* of the creator, in having made them ſo eſſential a part of human nature. On the contrary, it is as much our *duty* to *follow* the regular *movement* of thoſe appetites and affections, which the great God hath implanted within us, as our *fault* to *indulge* them to *exceſs*. So that we can only be bound to regulate them, in the manner above mentioned; to preſerve the *ballance even* between reaſon and appetite; that the latter may be indulged no farther, than the *neceſſities*, and *regular impulſes*, of nature require, and in a ſtrict *ſubſerviency* to the integrity and peace of our minds, and the order and happineſs of the world. When this is the caſe, *man* appears in his proper *excellence*; and

is as much *diſtinguiſhed* from the animal creation, as his preſent *mixed* compoſition will allow of. This is a ſcheme of *ſelf-command*, that is *rational*, *unperplexed*, and *practicable*; the *truth*, and eminent *advantages*, of it may be eaſily and clearly perceived: Whereas, if we extend the matter further, and aim at the total *ſuppreſſion* of the paſſions, we do not *govern*, but *offer violence* to ourſelves; we make *religion* a *force* upon *nature*, and a *contradiction* to the *deſign* of the GOD of nature; and, conſequently, expoſe it to the contempt of its adverſaries, as *ſuperſtitious rant*, and *extravagance*.

BUT, beſides, what has been already ſuggeſted in general, there are ſeveral more particular inſtances of *watchfulneſs* and *care* required, in order to the right *government* of ourſelves—We muſt *avoid* every thing, that has a tendency either to *excite*, or *ſtrengthen*, corrupt diſpoſitions in us. This is, eſpecially, neceſſary in ſome *peculiar complexions*, but highly expedient in *all*; becauſe the *force* of animal propenſions and appetites is ſo great, that, upon a little provocation, they will get *head* and, with an impetuous irreſtible *violence*, bear down all *reaſon* and *reflection* before them: And, in ſuch caſes, where there is no regular exerciſe of the *underſtanding*, and the only principle of action is wild, inconſiderate, brutal *tranſport*, the conſequence is highly to be *dreaded*; as it can probably be nothing leſs, than the utmoſt irregularity and confuſion.

AGAIN, we cannot keep our minds in any tolerable *order*, unleſs we watch the *firſt motions* of licentious deſire, and apply ourſelves to *moderate* and *controul* them. For we may eaſily cruſh that in its *infancy*, in its firſt *feeble* and *languid efforts*, which, by being ſuffered to gain *ſtrength*, may riſe to ſuch a degree of power and

and influence, as to be *unſurmountable*. That this is the caſe with reſpect to *unruly paſſions*, the woful *experience* of mankind ſufficiently teſtifies: And it is indeed the direct courſe of *nature*. For as it is impoſſible, that *two* contrary principles ſhould prevail *at once*, if *reaſon*, according to the wiſe plan of the maker of the world, has its due *weight*, *paſſion* will be *reſtrained* and *limited*; and, by the ſame unalterable tendency of things, if the *appetites* have the *aſcendent*, and maintain an uncontrouled *ſway*, *reaſon* muſt be *darkened* and *depreſſed*—And, conſequently, exactly in the proportion in which they are indulged to *exceſs*, the difficulty muſt always be the greater, of reducing them to their *original regular* ſtate.

The duty, which I am now explaining and urging, implies in it beyond all this, that we diligently *cultivate* that *virtuous* temper, which is directly *oppoſite* to thoſe *inordinate*, *miſchievous* paſſions, to which we are moſt ſtrongly *addicted*; and from whence, we have reaſon to apprehend, *peculiar danger*—That the man, whoſe prevailing paſſion is anger, make it his particular ſtudy to acquire a *meek*, *calm*, and *patient* diſpoſition; the *ambitious*, to improve in *humility*, in *generoſity* and *true greatneſs* of mind; and that he, in whom the *love* of *pleaſure* is the predominant vice, inure himſelf to *ſobriety*, *abſtinence*, and *rational exerciſes*: for, by this means, they will effectually gain the *victory* over their reſpective corrupt inclinations—Becauſe ſince, as it was hinted above, it is impoſſible that two *contrary* principles ſhould *both* predominate, in proportion as the *virtuous* temper is fixed and confirmed in us, thoſe *criminal affections*, which are intirely *repugnant* to it, muſt neceſſarily be weakened, till, at length, they are totally ſubdued.

AND to these means, for preserving *integrity* of heart, eradicating *depraved* dispositions, and planting, in the room of them, habits of *moderation*, and *goodness*, let us add sincere and frequent *prayer*. For, by this, we shall secure all necessary *assistances* from GOD, who is ever inclined to *contribute*, whatever is consistent with the perfections of his nature, and the wisdom of his providence, towards the *moral rectitude* of his reasonable creatures. And, moreover, such exercises of *piety* have an immediate tendency, to *cure* the *disorders* and *excesses* of the passions. For *serious addresses* to the Supreme Being, under becoming impressions of his glorious excellence, of his consummate spotless purity, and of the necessity, and intrinsic beauty, of virtue, naturally inspire a *generous contempt* of low and vain pleasures; *sublimity* of thought; a *nobleness* of mind, *superior* to the little accidents and revolutions, to which worldly affairs are subject; and *transform* the devout worshipper to a *divine* temper and life.

AND now that this *self-government* is our indispensable *duty*, founded both in *reason* and *interest*, is undeniable from hence, that the *temper* of the *heart* is the *spring* of *action*; or, in other words, the external *behaviour* is generally *directed*, *influenced*, and *determined* by the inward *dispositions*. If the prevailing principles of our minds are *corrupt* and *vicious*, it is, in the nature of things, next to impossible, that our practice should be *virtuous* and *regular*. *Evil principles* of action, as long as they are entertained and indulged, as directly produce a *wicked life*, as any other *causes* do their natural and immediate *effects*. And, therefore, till these are *corrected* and *altered*, it is vain to expect a *reformation* in life or manners.

THAT

THAT this is not meer looſe declamation, will be unanſwerably demonſtrated, by examining into the great *cauſes*, from whence all the *wickedneſs*, and moral *diſorders*, of the world proceed. They plainly ariſe from pride, ambition, covetouſneſs, and inordinate inclination to ſenſual pleaſure, and the like: and if theſe *luſts* were *mortified*, *temptations* to vice would loſe their inſinuating, bewitching, and fatal *prevalence*; and become *harmleſs*, becauſe *unſucceſsful*.—Let us aſk ourſelves impartially—would *riches* prove a *ſnare* to any, or engage them to act againſt their *conſciences*; would mankind violate the eternal ſacred law of *juſtice*, and purſue *baſe* and *diſhonourable* methods to obtain a great eſtate; if they were not carried away by a *ſordid covetouſneſs*, over-ruling the dictates of reaſon, choaking all ſeeds of ingenuity, blinding the underſtanding, and hindering them from conſidering, wherein even their *true intereſt* lies?—Would any ſacrifice religion, and virtue, and the dignity and perfection of their intelligent nature, to worldly *honour*, and the deceitful glare of *outward greatneſs*; if, inſtead of being devoted to a *falſe* and *irregular ambition*, they were intent on the cultivation and refinement of their minds in *amiable* and *generous* qualities, which alone is *true grandeur*, and aſpired after that immortal *honour*, which *cometh from* GOD *only?*

AND how *dull* and *inſipid*, how *inſignificant* and *unaffecting*, would be the charms of lawleſs *pleaſure*, and animal *gratifications*; if the *rational* part preſerved its due *authority* over the *ſenſitive*, and did not indulge it beyond the *calls* of nature, and the *directions* of cool judgment and diſcretion?—So that thoſe *corrupt appetites*, which we ourſelves have ſuffered to *ſpring up*, and be *predominant*, may fairly be reckoned the *proper* and *immediate ſources* of vice and wickedneſs; becauſe they give all *temptations*, that ariſe from exter-

external objects, their *weight* and *efficacy*; and, having *controuled*, the friendly dictates of the understanding, and of natural conscience, enable them, with infallible success, to *domineer over*, to *infeeble*, to *captivate* and *enslave* the soul. And nothing, surely, can be a stronger motive than this, to engage us to use our utmost care, that no *irregular* inclination, no *unnatural* passion, may *reign* within us.

But it is not only true, that when the *passions* are perverted, when they are wild, headstrong, and ungovernable, they must, in the nature of things, destroy our regard to *religion*, and subvert the most important obligations of *morality*; and that, while the *inward state* of the soul is in such *disorder*, it is absurd to expect any true sentiments of *piety*, or any stated *moderation*, *righteousness*, and *beneficence*, in outward life; this, I say, is not only undeniable truth, confirmed by our best reason, and by universal experience: but it will, moreover, be found upon reflection, that the *whole* of *religion* is little else, besides the right *conduct* and *government* of the *affections*. If these are *well-regulated*, the natural consequence will be *piety*, *order*, *happiness*: and, in every case, the *manner*, in which they are allowed to *operate*, determines the character to be either *virtuous*, or *vicious*.

Thus, for instance, if our *supreme love* be placed on what is most *excellent* and *amiable*, and has the greatest intrinsic *merit* to recommend it; it must, of necessity, center in God, a being of all possible perfection, the spring of life and joy, the original, and ever-flowing fountain of good: and from hence, will result a warm and lively *devotion*, and a chearful discharge of all the *duties* of *religion*. On the contrary, if it be fixed on *riches*, as its ultimate object, it degenerates into the vile passion of *covetousness*; if on *worldly honour*,

honour, it is the vice we call *ambition*; if on *pleaſure*, we ſhall quit all thoſe *exalted purſuits*, which refine and dignify our natures, and be abandoned to *luxury* and *intemperance*.—In like manner, if *ſhame*, *fear*, and *averſion*, be juſtly exerciſed, we ſhall be chiefly influenced by what is in itſelf *reproachful*, a *real* and *eternal diſgrace* to our reaſon, and moral powers; and not ſo much by the *falſe ſentiments* and *cuſtoms* of the world, and *arbitrary* notions of *honour*, and *diſhonour*; and muſt look upon *ſuch purſuits*, as are a *neceſſary ſource* of confuſion, remorſe, and miſery, to intelligent beings, and on the *diſpleaſure* of the infinite and almighty governor of the world, as the *greateſt* of all *evils*: or, in other words, we ſhall be guided, in all our actions, by a conſtant humble *reverence* of the DEITY, and a ſtrong *abhorrence* of *vice*. So that the *love*, and the *fear* of GOD, which are the ſubſtance of true *piety*, the foundation, and ſupport, of a regular, uniform, inflexible *virtue*, appear to be nothing *more*, than the *proper management* and *conduct* of our *affections*: and this proves undeniably, that we ought to regard this as a *firſt*, *eſſential*, point, on which all religion depends. This argument will receive vaſtly greater force, if we conſider,

SECONDLY, That *regular paſſions* are abſolutely neceſſary to our *happineſs*, and the only foundation of a *calm*, *ſerene*, *peaceful* life. This, indeed, neceſſarily follows from what was ſaid, under the former head, of their being the only ſpring of *good* and *virtuous* actions: but I ſhall purſue the argument a little more particularly, by ſhewing the *miſerable* condition of thoſe, who are *ſlaves* to vile imperious appetites. Let the *appetite* be of the *ſenſual* kind, and ſuppoſe a man to have an opportunity of enjoying all the *gratifications*, that a moſt *licentious* and *unbounded* imagination can prompt him to deſire: add to this, that he may indulge his inclinations

with the utmoſt *ſecrecy* without danger to his *reputation*, or temporal *intereſt:* and that he has no *uneaſy reflections* (being either quite *ſtupified*, or abandoned to *atheiſtical* deluſions) ariſing from *a conſcience* of good and evil, or the *fear* of *divine* diſpleaſure: admit all this, I ſay (which is the moſt favourable ſuppoſition that can be made, even in *idea*, on the ſide of vice, and what ſcarce ever happened in *real life*) the purſuit of ſenſitive *pleaſure*, as its ultimate *end*, muſt be vaſtly to the *diſadvantage* of an intelligent being; becauſe, for the ſake of ſuch *mean* ſatisfactions, which it has in common with mere animals, it indiſpoſes itſelf for pleaſures of an infinitely *ſuperior* kind, pleaſures which *entertain* and *felicitate* the higheſt beings in the univerſe, and which are only not *reliſhed*, becauſe they are not rightly *underſtood*. It may, it is true, have all that it *deſires*, and have no *notion* of any nobler happineſs; but will any one pretend to ſay, that this *depraved taſte* deſtroys the *real difference* of things; and that the godlike pleaſures of *reaſon* and *virtue*, which enlarge and exalt human nature, are not vaſtly preferable to thoſe groſs enjoyments of *ſenſe*, which are unſuitable to its faculties, and a reproach to its native worth and excellence?

But this, as was hinted before, is putting the caſe, as much as can be, to the *advantage* of irregular indulgencies. For we muſt all have obſerved, that they impair the *health*, ruin the *reputation*, conſume the *ſubſtance*, darken the *underſtanding*, and create inward *tumult* and *confuſion*, being a *diſtorted* and *unnatural* ſtate; and where there is a notion of a Deity and a providence, which, with all their inclination and art, wicked men cannot get intirely rid of, fill the mind with perplexing *anguiſh* and *diſconſolation:* and, conſequently, they are not only inconſiſtent with the *true happineſs* of intelligent beings, that ſublime happineſs which they

they were originally deſigned, and are peculiarly fitted for, but muſt, in the nature of things, neceſſarily tend to their *miſery*. But,

In the THIRD place, which is the moſt important conſideration of all, that inward *order*, and *purity* of mind, which I am now recommending, is the only thing that will ſecure the favour of GOD, and the glorious rewards and bleſſings of *eternity*. It is this *alone*, that conſtitutes the real *goodneſs* and *virtue* of actions; which are only ſo far valuable, and acceptable to GOD, as they proceed from *good* principles and diſpoſitions. A man may perform an *outward act* of piety, juſtice, or beneficence; and, yet, if he does it from *ſuch motives*, in which *religion* and *virtue* are not concerned, it will not be a *virtuous* action; nay, it may be done to ſerve ſome *ill deſign*, and, then, it will be a *wicked* action: he may be *temperate* with reſpect to carnal *pleaſures*, and *mortified* againſt the impulſes of *ſome* irregular paſſions, to ſerve the purpoſes of *others*, that are more *intimate*, and *better reliſhed*; and, in ſuch caſes, even his temperance and mortification muſt be *offenſive* to the Supreme Being, who judges of mens characters not by outward *appearances*, which may be *artificial*, *ſtrained*, and *unnatural*, but by the *honeſty*, or *corruption*, of the *heart*.

To which we may add, that the *reaſonable part*, in man, is placed in a poſt of *government* and *authority*: and what are its *ſubjects?* The various *appetites*, *affections*, and *inſtincts* of the animal nature. To theſe it is ordained to give *laws*, to conſult their *uſes*, direct to their proper *exerciſe*, to keep them within the ſtated *bounds*, and controul them when they grow *impetuous* and *extravagant*. And this *government* is a great and moſt important *truſt*, ſince the *beauty*, or *deformity*, the *happineſs*, or *miſery*, of the whole moral world depend upon the right *adminiſtration* of it.

For unruly *paſſions* as naturally create *confuſion* and *anarchy* in the *moral* ſyſtem, as *tumults* raiſed, by the members of any particular ſociety, againſt lawful powers, and not quelled and ſuppreſſed, do in the *political*. So that men are, in reaſon, as *accountable* to the Supreme Ruler, from whom all authority is derived, for the right *uſe*, or *abuſe*, of their *powers* in point of *ſelf-government*; as thoſe are, or can be, who are deputed by him to any other *ſpecies* of *government*. And we have the utmoſt reaſon to believe, that he will call them to a *ſtrict account*; ſince it cannot be *indifferent* to the infinitely wiſe governor of mankind, whether they diſcharge their *truſt* well, or ill. And, therefore, it is our wiſdom and intereſt to be watchful, at all times, over the *thoughts* and *motions* of our hearts, and to keep our *appetites* in due order; not only, as we ſhall thereby purſue the *deſign* of that *nature*, which he has given us, but from the *awe* of his righteous and impartial *judgment*.

In that great and moſt ſolemn day, when we ſhall all appear before the eternal God, our almighty, omniſcient, and incorruptible judge, it will be in vain to plead the *ſtrength* of ungoverned appetites, in defence of a *vicious* and *diſſolute* practice. For it may be aſked—How our paſſions *came* to be ſo *ſtrong* and *ungoverned?*—Why reaſon did not *moderate* and *controul* them?—And whether we are not juſtly *anſwerable* for this *voluntary* corruption of our nature, and *abuſe* of its excellent capacities; and for all the bad *conſequences*, that flow from it? Should it be pleaded further, by thoſe who are addicted to immoderate *luſt*, or *anger*, that they follow the *direction* and *impulſe* of their *natural* paſſions; paſſions, which God himſelf made *a part* of their conſtitution, and therefore deſigned ſhould be *indulged:* it may be anſwered, that licentious, exceſſive, hurtful paſſions are of mens *own raiſing*; and not what God *originally planted* in human nature; and that the permitting

mitting them, to take ſuch *ſcope* and *influence*, is directly repugnant to the law of our *nature*; which is this, the underſtanding at the *helm*, to *ſteer* and *guide* the inferior and baſer principles.—Beſides, our being placed in a ſtate of *trial* ſuppoſes, that our *natural* deſires are apt to be *irregular*, and ſo may prove a *temptation* and a *ſnare* to us; and, conſequently, that we are bound to *watch* and *reſtrain* their exceſſes.

STRICTLY connected with ſelf-government, is the duty of *ſelf-denial*, of which it is, indeed, no other than one neceſſary part; and, upon that account, very proper to be explained, in an age ſo devoted to *ſelf-gratification*.—The word ſelf-denial, it muſt be confeſſed, ſounds harſh and ungrateful. *Enthuſiaſm* has ſpread *darkneſs* all around it. The ſevere and rigidly recluſe, have made it appear *frightful*. But the queſtion is not, what a *monſter* error has repreſented it to be; but what it really is in *itſelf*. Separated from its *imaginary* and *unnatural* attendants of pennance and famine, melancholy gloomineſs and ſolitude, 'it will be found to 'be nothing elſe to the *ſound mind* but what *temperance* is to the 'body; and the only infallible means of reſtoring *health* and *quiet*, 'to a *diſordered* and *troubled* mind. It may be cloathed in *purple*, 'as well as in *ſackcloth*; and be cultivated in the moſt *diſtinguiſhed* 'and *affluent*, as well as in *mean* and *ſcanty* circumſtances: nay, 'its victory and triumph will be the more complete in ſtations of '*dignity*, *wealth*, and *honour*, if it *repels* luxury, inſolence, and 'tyranny; than they can be, in a *lower* and more *limited* ſphere 'of action, where there are much fewer *temptations* to *exceſs*.' It is, in ſhort, nothing more, but the retrenching *extravagance*, avoiding *unbounded* and *hurtful* indulgencies of pleaſure, and maintaining an unblemiſhed and ſteady *integrity*, in all conditions and ranks of human life. It muſt, therefore, ever conſtitute a *reaſonable*

able and *worthy* character; it must be *useful*, and *necessary*, at all times. There can, not only, be no true *christianity*, but no *religion*, no *virtue*, without it.

'DIFFICULTY always enhances our *estimation* of virtue.' But where there is no occasion for the exercise of *self-denial*, there can be no *difficulty*, no *conflict* at all; and, consequently, scarce any *virtue* at all: where there is but little need of self-denial, there can be no *excellence*, or *distinction*, of virtuous character. Intirely, therefore, to supersede the obligation of this duty would be, utterly to cancel all *human* virtues. *Excellence* of *nature* might still remain, as in the unchangeable DEITY, who *cannot be tempted with evil*, but a *rewardable morality* there could not be; and, consequently, the present probationary state must be a scene of utter *impertinence*, and wholly *unadapted* to the chief purpose, for which it was originally designed. And it is, likewise, an unavoidable conclusion from the above indisputable premises, that the more *various* the instances of self-denial are, which now occur to mankind, the larger *scope* there is left, for their rising to signal *eminencies* of glory and happiness hereafter, and for *displays* of the divine favour and munificence.

THE *nature*, and *situation*, of man are such, that his moral qualities must acquire their refinement, their strength, and stability, chiefly by *exercise*. His original *temperament*, and *faculties* of reason, will scarce admit of his making an *undisturbed* and *easy* progress, to any exemplary and shining height of perfection. But a habit of *self-controul*, in all instances of ungoverned license and excess, the having experienced the enlarging and animating pleasures of *victory*, after various hard *conflicts*, will produce a *force* and *constancy* of virtue, and a *facility* in the practice of it, like what

is

is found in far *ſuperior* natures; and, by putting man continually upon his guard, may render him, in a conſiderable degree, in this world, what he hopes to be more completely in a ſtate of confirmation and triumph hereafter, *like* unto the *angels of* GOD.

BUT all the advantages, that can poſſibly reſult from the exerciſe of *ſelf-denial*, muſt ſpring from its being rightly underſtood. I now, then, proceed to a brief explication of it; and ſhall purpoſely purſue ſuch a method, and take ſuch latitude in diſcourſing upon it; as will lead me to rectify the principal miſtakes, that have ariſen concerning it, at the ſame time that I undertake to deſcribe its fixed, genuine, and unalterable nature. Now the utmoſt ſcope, that the ſubject is, in itſelf, capable of is—to conſider *ſelf*, the thing to be corrected, reſtrained, and limited, as *reaſonable*, *moral*, *animal*; or, as it may ſtand to denote an *individual*, diſtinct from the *ſpecies*, or univerſal *community* of mankind.

AND, FIRST, as to *reaſonable ſelf*---'that can never be *denied*, 'while it continues reaſonable, without utterly diſclaiming *reaſon*, 'and making ſelf-denial a thing quite *unnatural*.' We can never be obliged to deſpiſe, and vilify, this *ray* of the Divinity within us, this ſuperior *glory* of our nature, by repreſenting it as abſolutely *blind*, and *unable* to *judge* in matters of *religion*; nor by believing, implicitly, *abſurdities*, and *contradictions*, under the pretence of a ſacred reverence for divine *myſteries*, and for exalting *faith* above *reaſon*. Nor can we ever be required to admit, that the *ſenſes* can yield no ſufficient or valid *evidence* in controverſies of *faith*: becauſe the evidence of *ſenſe* is greatly *ſuperior* to that of any *faith*, which is built on a mere *traditional teſtimony* (as that of all chriſtians is at preſent) and becauſe the ſtrongeſt *proofs*, of the truth of our holy religion, were originally *appeals* to *ſenſe*. And to adhere

to it in *one* instance, and reject it in *another*, where it is *equally* capable of judging, must absolutely destroy the *ground* of *all faith*.

But *reason* may still be *presumptuous*; and upon the same principles, on which I think it my duty to assert its due *honours*, I would not mollify, or excuse, its *excesses*. In the vast scheme of nature and providence, infinitely exceeding its contracted scope of apprehension, if it will *believe* nothing, merely because it does not minutely *understand* every thing; if, having positive and irresistible proofs of his *wisdom* and *goodness*, it has no degree of *implicit faith* even in God, as to the *best manner* of operation, of which it is little more a fit and adequate *judge*, than the *blind* are of *colours*, or the *deaf* of the harmony of *music*; if because, dark and groveling as it is, it will allow nothing to be *true*, unless it can trace, particularly, all the precise *reasons* and *uses* of it: it can be no more, than a bold confident *affectation* and *mimickry* of reason, which *reason itself* must, for its own honour, *disclaim*.

Again, as to *moral self*—'it is a contradiction to suppose, that 'it can speak *contemptuously* of *moral righteousness*;' as if our best and highest attainments, in virtue, were absolutely *insignificant* in the sight of God, and could have no share in our *justification* at his tribunal. It can never strain scripture *metaphors*, which were only used to depreciate *ceremonial* righteousness, when substituted in the place of *moral*, to render *true piety* and *goodness* despicable. It ought not to imagine, that because virtue does not properly *merit* a reward—that it has therefore no *loveliness*, no intrinsic *excellence* in it, to render it a *fit* and *suitable* object of the divine complacency. On the contrary, it must allow, that if there be any *worthiness*, any just ground of *praise*, in us, it must spring, intirely, from our own *virtuous dispositions*.

And

And with respect to *individual self*, considered as distinct from the *species* of mankind; and *animal self*; the chief and whole stress of *controul*, and *opposition*, lies in the following particulars, *viz.* 'in keeping all the passions *calm* and *regular*, and avoiding the 'excesses of unlawful pleasure, which *debase* human nature, and 'necessarily introduce *confusion* and *misery*; in checking all *ten-* 'dencies to vice, and maintaining, constantly, a *refined sense* of 'things, and a *relish* for *intellectual* and *moral* delights; in enter- 'taining views beyond our own *private advantage*, in cultivating 'sentiments of *friendship*, and *public-spiritedness*, and the principles 'of disinterested *benevolence*, and *compassion*; and in renouncing 'temporal *good* of all kinds, the most alluring prospects of *honour* 'and *carnal gratification*, out of regard to the duty we owe to 'God, the sacred dictates of *conscience*, and the *common good* of 'our fellow-creatures.'

And this leads me just to mention the most *severe* and *critical* act of *self-denial*, that we can ever be called to exercise; and that is——*suffering* for the cause of *virtue* and *true religion*. 'And I 'would here ask, what reason can be assigned why any man should 'even *die* for the *good* of his *country*, if not for the sacred prin- 'ciples of *virtue*, and the *greatest good* of *mankind*? The con- 'sideration of our *country* is a far *inferior* motive; if the one 'therefore be applauded as the *perfection* of *human generosity* (as 'it is, by all the professed admirers of *heathen* morality) the other 'must be, comparatively speaking, the *virtue* of an *angel*.' To what extreme contempt, then, must this subject the *passive* spirit, the *indolent* and *ungenerous* principles of *the many*, in every age, who have *complied* with all outward forms, and *subscribed* to all articles of faith, that have happened to be *established* in particular

countries; and who, of consequence, would have been *papists* at *Rome*, *protestants* in *England*, and *mahometans* in *Turkey*.---And all this, not only to avoid the *fiery trial*; but to procure *outward respect*, and the more *complete accommodations* of *sensitive life*. By which,

In the FIRST place, 'they throw *reproach* upon all *reformations* in religion, and even upon our happy *rescue* from the yoke 'of *Romish* tyranny and servitude; which could never have been 'effected, upon their *tame*, *grovelling*, and *inactive principles*.' No good to mankind, in times of *corruption* and *danger*, can possibly spring from such a *slavish* and *pusillanimous* spirit.—It tends, in the SECOND place, 'to destroy all *true religion*, by leaving it, 'intirely, to the discretion and judgment of the *civil magistrate*; 'which, if the *majority* of *voices* are consulted, must introduce 'either *paganism*, or the *imposture* of *Mahomet*, or *popery*.'—THIRDLY, it tends 'to the utter confusion of *common honesty*, by 'leaving no distinction between *truth* and *falshood*.'—And it must likewise, in the end, 'extirpate *common sense*, by leaving mankind 'no *defence*, no *guard*, against the incroachments of universal *ignorance* and *superstition*.'

SER-

SERMON I.

Of catholic communion.

1 Cor. x. 17.

For we, being many, are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

WHOEVER attentively conſiders the *excellency* and *perfection* of the *chriſtian* religion, its ſuitableneſs to the depraved ſtate of mankind, and what a direct tendency the obſervation of its precepts has, to promote the true dignity and happineſs of human nature, muſt be deeply concerned, to ſee the deſign of it in ſo great a meaſure defeated, by *bigotry* and *party zeal*. It muſt, to a *generous* mind, be matter of very uneaſy reflection, that thoſe excellent rules of juſtice, truth, and mercy, which are eternal laws of *nature*, and ſo ſtrongly inculcated by the *goſpel*, ſhould be infringed and violated for the ſake of outward *forms*, and inſignificant, ſubtle, confounding *ſpeculations*. And it is natural to inquire, how it comes to paſs, that the profeſſors of a religion, the genius of which is ſo mild and amiable, and that breathes nothing but moderation, peace, and uni-

univerſal charity, ſhould be ſo forward to *divide* into a variety of ſects, *reviling*, and *excommunicating*, one another.'

In ſome, this ſeems to be occaſioned by *prejudices* of *education*. They have been taught, that *particular ſchemes* are the *ſubſtance* of chriſtianity; *fundamental truths*, upon a belief, or diſbelief, of which, their eternal happineſs or miſery depend; and, in conſequence of this, they are not only *tenacious* of them, and *averſe* to a free and impartial *enquiry*; but apt to entertain *hard thoughts* of thoſe, who have not, exactly, the *ſame ſentiments* of religion with themſelves. In others, it may proceed from *ſelfiſhneſs*, and a regard to *private intereſt*; which makes them condemn particular *opinions*, and the *abettors* of them, as infamous, to ſecure their *popularity* and *influence*.—In others, again, it may ſpring from *pride*, a fruitful root of *contention*, and the cauſe of numberleſs *irregularities* and *diſcords*. Any one, indeed, who is acquainted with the *powers* of human nature, the influence of our *paſſions*, and the many *prejudices* to which we are ſubject (ſome of which are *viſible*, whilſt others *inſenſibly*, but at the ſame time altogether as *effectually*, biaſs and captivate the mind) ſuch a one, I ſay, would ſcarce believe, that ſo great a part of mankind ſhould have that extravagant veneration for their *own judgments*, as to ſet them up for a kind of *ſtandard*, or *teſt* of truth. However, ſo it is in fact: they do not pretend to be *infallible*, and yet are never in *the wrong*; and if you refuſe to pay them the compliment, of ſubmitting to their *wiſer opinions*, they ſeem to think *themſelves*, and *religion* too, to be inſulted and degraded; and come to this peeviſh concluſion, that if you will not take your notions of *chriſtianity* from *them*, you ſhall not be allowed to be *chriſtians at all*.' Thus, which is indeed very ſtrange and unnatural, their *vanity*, which is really inconſiſtent with all *religion*, prompts them to look upon

upon themſelves, and thoſe of the ſame name and diſtinction, as the only *true chriſtians*; and they are apt to ſay to others, however *honeſt* and *conſcientious*, in the ſpirit of a conceited and boaſting *Phariſee—Stand off, come not near*, for we are *holier* than you.

In oppoſition to ſuch narrow principles, it is my deſign, from theſe words of St. *Paul*, to recommend the great duty of *extenſive chriſtian charity*, and *catholic communion*; a ſubject, which the *condition* of the *chriſtian church* has, in every age, rendered ſeaſonable, and which is, withal, of the utmoſt importance. For if *all chriſtians* could be perſuaded, to conſider themſelves as members of the *ſame ſociety*, intitled to the *ſame privileges*, and having the *ſame hope of their calling*; it muſt, of courſe, promote mutual *eſteem*, *concord*, and *harmony*, and make them regard one another, according to their *real merit*: by which means, *impoſitions* on *conſcience*, violent *controverſies*, *unſcriptural terms* of communion, *ſchiſms*, *perſecutions*, &c, (which have been of fatal conſequence to *religion*, and *civil ſociety*) would be intirely prevented. I ſhall reduce, what I have to offer, to the three following heads.

First, That all, who truly belong to the *body* of *Chriſt*, have *a right* to the privilege of *chriſtian communion*. And therefore,

Secondly, That nothing ſhould be *required*, in order to *communion*, but what is abſolutely *neceſſary* to *denominate* a man a *chriſtian*. And,

In the third place, that this univerſal brotherly *communion* of all *good chriſtians*, notwithſtanding leſſer differences, as it beſt anſwers the end of the inſtitution of the *holy ſupper*, is, alſo, the moſt

effectual way to advance the *honour*, and *intereſt*, of *true chriſtianity*.

THE FIRST thing, that I propoſed to prove, was, that all, who truly belong to the *body* of *chriſt*, have *a right* to the privilege of *chriſtian communion*. This is plainly implyed in theſe words of the apoſtle: *For we, being many, are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread*—The obvious ſenſe of which paſſage is, that one great deſign of appointing this *ſocial* branch of *chriſtian worſhip*, eating *bread* and drinking *wine* together, in *remembrance* of *Chriſt* as our ſaviour, was to be a publick *evidence* and *teſtimony*, that we belong to his *ſpiritual body*; and that none ought to be *debared* from partaking of that ordinance, to whom *this character* juſtly belongs. For if all, who join in this *holy communion*, are thereby declared to be *members* of the *one body* of *Chriſt*, we naturally infer from hence, that no other *qualification* is neceſſary, than that they *really belong* to this body; that we, in effect, deny this of all without exception, whom we take upon us to *exclude* from chriſtian communion; and that ſuch excluſion can, on no other principle, be *juſtified*.—This, then, being the plain doctrine of St. *Paul*, we ſhall be much ſafer in acting agreeably to it; than we can be, if we proceed on *precarious* and *conjectural* concluſions of our own, not *warranted*, and *ſupported*, by the new Teſtament.

AND to render the interpretation, which I have given, more probable, let it be conſidered, that it is very much confirmed by the *reaſon* of the thing itſelf; which, in every view of it, pleads ſtrongly for thus *enlarging* the *foundation*, on which chriſtian ſocieties are to be formed, and diſclaims all more reſtrained and private views. For all, who are true members of *Chriſt's body*, the

church, will, without doubt, be allowed to be under indiſpenſable obligations, to obey every expreſs *command* of *Chriſt*, which they acknowledge *as ſuch*; notwithſtanding the *error* of their judgment, even in points of *conſequence:* Or, elſe, we muſt ſuppoſe, that an *involuntary miſtake*, in *ſome* inſtances, will be admitted as a *plea* for *wilful diſobedience*, or hinder our ſerving GOD *acceptably*, in *others*—Neither of which can, I think, be aſſerted, without entertaining very unworthy notions of the wiſdom and goodneſs of the ſupreme governor of men, and undermining the foundation of all *religious obedience*. And if, as is the caſe upon the chriſtian ſcheme, there are but two poſitive inſtitutions, both of which are intended and adapted to cheriſh good purpoſes, and promote a virtuous life; he, who by wrong ſentiments conſiſtent with general integrity, is deprived of the uſeful influence of the *one*, has, in reaſon, the more need of the aſſiſtance of the *other*, to ſtrengthen right diſpoſitions in his mind, and carry his habits of piety to a higher degree of perfection.

AGAIN, whoever belongs, to the body of *Chriſt*, has an intereſt in him as his ſaviour; and therefore, however erroneous in other reſpects, may, as to his habitual frame and temper, be fit to *commemorate* his dying love, and the wonderful goodneſs of GOD the father of all (the original *contriver* and *author* of the redemption of mankind) with *joy* and *gratitude:* Upon which account, it muſt be abſolutely unreaſonable, to hinder perſons of this character from joining in the *ſolemnity*, (which was inſtituted on purpoſe to *perpetuate* this thankful *commemoration*,) without an *expreſs* and *particular* injunction of the chriſtian lawgiver.

FINALLY, as all the real members, of the body of *Chriſt*, are intitled to the *tranſcendent* and *glorious* privileges of the kingdom of

of heaven hereafter; can it be imagined, that they are unfit to partake of *lower* and more *imperfect* privileges? Or can we be excuſed in denying them the proper means, to aſſiſt and compleat their preparation for the heavenly felicity? Can we queſtion their right to commemorate his amazing condeſcenſion, and preſent ſtate of exaltation and glory, who *dyed for* their *ſins*, in common with thoſe of all other ſincere chriſtians; who *roſe again for* their *juſtification*; and is gone to provide *manſions* for them in his *father's houſe?* The contrary conduct, let us examine the matter in every light, will, I am perſuaded, be found to be much more becoming; *viz.* that, by allowing them the privilege of *chriſtian communion*, we treat them as *brethren*; not as *ſtrangers* and *foreigners*, but *fellow citizens with the ſaints, and of the houſhold of* God.

The second propoſition naturally ariſing from the text, which I propoſed to explain and illuſtrate, is this—that nothing ſhould be required in order to *communion*, but what is abſolutely neceſſary to denominate a man *a chriſtian*. For if all, who belong to the body of *Chriſt*, have *a right* to chriſtian communion; nothing ought to be *inſiſted* on in order to communion, but what is an *eſſential* and *indiſpenſable* part of true chriſtianity. Was it indeed a communion of particular ſects, their *diſcriminating* ſentiments, and cuſtoms, would be the proper *qualification:* But the thing, which St. *Paul* ſpeaks of, is the communion of *chriſtians*; and, therefore, whatever determines the *chriſtian character*, muſt alſo determine the right to *this communion.*——And what is this? Is it to eſpouſe the principles of any *ſociety*, or *denomination*, of chriſtians? Is it to form a juſt idea of *every part* of the goſpel-revelation? Nothing of this kind can be maintained, without cutting off, the far greater part of the world, from all *hope* of *ſalvation* by *Chriſt*.

How

How then, ſhall we come to a right knowledge, of this *general invariable ground* of chriſtian communion? Why by ſearching the *ſcriptures:* For however the *ſentiments* of men, through weakneſs, prejudice, or intereſt, may be *confuſed* and *divided*, the *rule* of the goſpel is *expreſs* and *certain: viz.* that whoſoever *believeth* that *Jeſus is the Chriſt*, and endeavours to *underſtand* the revelation which he brought from heaven, and to *act agreeably* to it, is a good chriſtian, whatever his miſtakes may be in matters of leſſer moment; and, of conſequence, the connection between theſe two having been already ſufficiently proved, is intitled to the *charity* and *fellowſhip* of chriſtians. And it is neceſſary that this rule be ſtrictly *adhered* to, for this reaſon likewiſe, becauſe, without it, there can be no *poſſible center* of *chriſtian unity*. All parties, being poſſeſſed with an high opinion of their *diſtinguiſhing* principles, will probably inſiſt on one, or more, of them as *fundamental* principles; and introduce endleſs *ſchiſms* and *diſorders*. If we are contented with the ſcripture-rule, we may unite in *affection* and *brotherly communion*, though we cannot in *opinion:* but if we propoſe any *terms*, *diſtinct* from what the goſpel has directly fixed, as eſſential to chriſtianity, and allow the *ſame liberty* to others, which we claim for ourſelves; in every ſuch inſtance, *fancy* and *partiality* being our only guides, we muſt for ever deſpair of *harmony* and *peace*.

Besides, 'to require any thing but a *profeſſion* of chriſtianity, 'demonſtrated to be *ſincere* by a regular and virtuous life, in order 'to *communion*, is making the thing itſelf *impracticable*, which not-'withſtanding is injoined in the New Teſtament as an *univerſal duty:*' for an *uniformity* either of *right*, or *wrong*, ſentiments, in all points of *belief* and *practice*, can never be expected, whilſt men

have ſuch different *capacities* and *advantages*, ſuch different *educations*, *paſſions*, and *intereſts*. It cannot be, that they ſhould all *concur* in the *ſame explications* of ſcripture, or that this, which is a thing *impoſſible*, ſhould be inculcated, by the infinite wiſdom of GOD, as a neceſſary *preparation* for the performance of an *univerſal duty*.

OR if we carry our thoughts further, and conſider the ordinance of the *Lord's ſupper* under the notion of a *privilege*; what reaſon have we to believe, that *Chriſt* has ordered any of his faithful ſervants to be *debarred* from it, for a mere involuntary error in *another point*, which has no immediate *connection* with it, and does not *interfere* with the peculiar *deſign* and *uſes* of it? If it had been our Saviour's real intention, that other things ſhould be regarded as *terms* of *church-communion*, beſides what are *neceſſary* to conſtitute a *true chriſtian*; without doubt, they would have been particularly *ſpecified*, and *declared* in ſo ſtrong and diſtinct a manner, like the *terms* of *ſalvation*, as not to leave room for wild and endleſs *diſputes*. Had it been ſaid, for example, that none but thoſe, who ſubmit to ſuch a particular *rite*, or believe ſuch *doctrines*, ſhall be admitted to *communion* in chriſtian ſocieties, the caſe muſt have been beyond *controverſy*: and, in my opinion, nothing leſs, than ſo *expreſs* and *formal* a declaration, can determine either of the *two* to be *neceſſary*. As, therefore, there is an intire *ſilence* in this reſpect, as to all the *peculiar ſentiments*, and *uſages*, by which chriſtians are diſtinguiſhed from each other; this is a ſtrong preſumption, that the author of our religion did not deſign, that any of them ſhould be *inſiſted on*. And the only ſure way for us, in order to form a right judgment in particular caſes, where the goſpel has not *explicitly* determined, is to argue from the general *nature* of the

the holy communion, and the general *ſcope* and *ſtrain* of chriſtianity; both which, as has been already ſhewn, direct us to receive true chriſtians of *all denominations:* and, finally, to argue on ſuch principles, as are moſt honourable to our religion, and repreſent it in a worthy and amiable light; as a religion that inſpires *peace*, *condeſcenſion*, *mutual forbearance*, and a *generous extenſive charity*. I now proceed to ſhow,

In the THIRD place, that an univerſal brotherly *communion* of all *good chriſtians*, notwithſtanding leſſer differences, as it beſt anſwers the *end* of the inſtitution of the holy ſupper, is alſo the moſt effectual way to advance the *honour*, and *intereſt*, of true chriſtianity.—And, *firſt*, it is *honourable* to chriſtianity, that it lays the chief ſtreſs on *ſincerity*, more than on the juſteſt *ſpeculations*, and the greateſt exactneſs in *external* and *inſtituted duties*; and inculcates that, as the only neceſſary *recommendation* to the eſteem and friendſhip of our *fellow-creatures*, which intitles to the *favour* of God, and the *rewards* and *bleſſings* of eternity.—It is *more honourable* to chriſtianity to ſuppoſe, that all thoſe, who, in the temper and diſpoſition of their minds, are *qualified*, to receive in a *right* manner, the *privileges* of the goſpel, ſhould be allowed to *partake* of them; than to aſſert, that they are *excluded*, upon no foundation for it in the *reaſon* of the thing, but by a mere *arbitrary appointment*.—It is much *more honourable* to our holy religion, that there be a *general eaſy rule*, for the communion of *all chriſtians*; than to explain it in ſuch a manner, as leaves it on *uncertain indeterminable principles*, and, conſequently, to *humour* and *prejudice*.

Again, whatever naturally tends to promote *concord*, and *unite* chriſtians of all denominations, muſt give a more *worthy* and *ad-*

vantageous idea of the goſpel of *Chriſt*; than what has a direct tendency to create *animoſities*, and *diviſions*. Now the latter, I take to be the conſequence, of *narrowing* our communion, beyond what a regard to *ſincerity*, and *common chriſtianity*, requires. It begets *ſkyneſs* and *alienation* of affection; *jealouſy*, and *diffidence* of each other. It begets *paſſion*, heightens *prejudice*, and maintains a ſpirit of *oppoſition*; as the reſult of which, chriſtianity itſelf is expoſed to *contempt*, and thereby *weakened*; and, on this account likewiſe, that the profeſſors of it, acting on ſuch principles, inſtead of conſidering themſelves as *united* by one *common intereſt*, and bearing one *grand character*, that ought to *ſwallow up* all *lower diſtinctions*, will be apt to purſue *ſeparate views*, and ſupport *factions* againſt each other: but, chiefly, as the *general cauſe* of religion and virtue is likely to *ſuffer* by this conduct, by having leſs *eſteem* and *regard* paid to it, than to comparatively *uſeleſs peculiarities*; which, at beſt, are but *appendages*, *fences*, and *helps* to true religion.

And, finally, I cannot but be of opinion, that an *univerſal friendly communion*, of all ſincere chriſtians, will, more effectually propagate the *knowledge* of chriſtian principles, than the contrary *contracted* ſcheme. *Accidents*, indeed, may happen, which may ſeem to make *againſt* this; but they are to be allowed no weight, againſt the *natural tendency* of things. Whatever, there is of this kind, may be owing *to indolence*, and the want of due *care* and *application*, to *rectify* the ſentiments of thoſe who are erroneous. And it will be ſufficient to my preſent purpoſe, if it be allowed, that we have much *better opportunities*, if we improve our advantages aright, of convincing thoſe, who are in the *ſame communion* with us, and, conſequently, with whom we have an *immediate concern*; than others, that we have but very *few* and *ſlight*

ſlight occaſions to converſe with—Beſides, that a condeſcending charitable behaviour will *conciliate* their *affection*, and induce them to conſider, what we have to offer, with *calmneſs* and *impartiality*; whereas if we keep them at a *diſtance*, and treat them as perſons *unqualified* for *chriſtian communion*, they will think themſelves injured, and contract a *prejudice* againſt us; and, perhaps, receive all our arguments with *indifference*, if not with *contempt*.

If it be objected to what has been ſaid, that, by allowing a *promiſcuous communion* of all ſincere chriſtians, of different denominations, the true primitive chriſtian *principles*, and *practice*, may, in the end, be *loſt* in ſome important points—I anſwer, that if this proves any thing, it lays a ſure foundation for all manner of *impoſition*. For the primitive chriſtian *principles*, and chriſtian *practice*, are juſt of that *importance* to particular perſons, and ſocieties, as they *apprehend* them to be. If, therefore, the *ſociety*, to which I belong, have *a right* to make their principles, from the opinion which they have of their importance, *ſtated terms* of chriſtian communion, ſo have *another*, if they judge theirs to be equal moment, though their principles are directly *oppoſite*; ſo has *every ſociety*, be the doctrines it eſpouſes true or falſe, honourable to chriſtianity, or ſubverſive of its intereſts——And can any thing like *order* upon the whole, any real ſupport of *religion*, reſult from hence? No: Nothing but *inconſiſtent terms* of communion; nothing but *breaches* of *peace*; nothing but *injury* and *oppreſſion*; the greateſt part of which will fall on *tender* and *ſcrupulous* conſciences, on men of the moſt *ſteady* and *inflexible* virtue.

The

THE pernicious conſequences, of *narrowing* the *foundations* of chriſtian communion, never appeared in ſo ſtrong and glaring a light, as in the church of *Rome*; which, aſſuming to itſelf the name of the *catholic church*, and treating all of a different perſuaſion as *hereticks* and *reprobates*, has maintained, for ſeveral ages, a *faction* againſt *common chriſtianity*, and the natural *rights* of mankind; and ſupported it by ſuch deteſtable methods of *tyranny* and *perſecution*, as are an infinite ſcandal to *religion*, and a reproach even to *human nature*. I might inſtance in the barbarities, executed on our poor brethren *abroad*, in ſeveral parts of *Europe*; and, particularly in that *refinement*, and *horrid monſter*, of cruelty the court of inquiſition. But we need not ſeek for *foreign* inſtances, ſince the hiſtory of our *own nation* will furniſh undeniable proofs, that this *antichriſtian* church, for promoting its *intereſts*, and the extirpation of *hereſy*, has not ſcrupled to *conſecrate* treaſon and murder, and commit ſuch vile enormities, as we may defy *atheiſm* itſelf to exceed: and which, if they were really dictated by the chriſtian ſpirit, would render our now excellent religion a *wicked deſtructive* ſcheme, and juſtly expoſe it to the *ſcorn* and *indignation* of mankind. The repreſenting theſe things in their natural colours, without artificial and ſtudied aggravations, muſt be ſufficient to raiſe a ſtrong *deteſtation* of the *contracted* and *ſlaviſh* principles, from whence they proceed, where there are any ſeeds of *ingenuity*, any remains of *tenderneſs* and *compaſſion*.

BUT I chooſe rather, at preſent, to draw a veil over ſuch ſcenes of *horror*, and turn your minds to more pleaſing reflections, to ſentiments of *joy* and *gratitude*; gratitude to the ſovereign diſpoſer of all things, for having *delivered us from the fear of our enemies*, diſappointed their repeated attempts, to bring us again under an inſupportable

portable *yoke of bondage*, to baniſh *true chriſtianity*, and impoſe their *own religion* upon us—A religion, the fundamental principle of which is *ignorance*, and *implicit faith*; a religion, which is a contradiction to *reaſon*, its doctrines *incredible*, and its worſhip the very *dregs* of *pagan* ſuperſtition and enthuſiaſm; a religion, which, by its compenſations for moral guilt, by its ridiculous and ſlight penances, *ſooths* and *encourages* the licentious paſſions of human nature; a religion, intirely calculated for the advancement of *prieſtly* power and grandeur; a religion founded in *fraud* and *impoſition*, and propagated by *violence* and *blood*.

LET us, my brethren, to ſhew us *chriſtians*, be careful to purſue quite oppoſite meaſures of conduct. Let us root out of our minds all *narrowneſs* of temper, all the ſeeds of *cenſorioufneſs* and of *bitter uncharitable* zeal. Let us cultivate an *eſteem* of *all* our brethren, and an ardent *concern* for their welfare. Let us bear with their *errors*, and treat their *weakneſſes* with tenderneſs and condeſcenſion. Let us encourage and comfort their minds, and, by our *moderation* and *candour*, aſſiſt their progreſs in the chriſtian life. Let us expreſs no *contempt* of them for their inferior attainments, and carefully avoid *arrogance*, and *contentious emulation*. Let not our kind regards be confined to the *particular ſociety*, of which we ourſelves are members, but extend to the *whole houſhold of faith*; that, in the exerciſe of that *univerſal charity*, which our holy religion recommends, we may have a ſtrong zeal for the *general cauſe* of chriſtianity; a compaſſionate ſenſe of the oppreſſions and injuries, which our brethren, in any part of the world, groan under; and behave towards them, in all reſpects, as perſons who make up, with us, *one ſpiritual community*, under *Chriſt the univerſal head*.

SUCH diſpoſitions, and ſuch a behaviour, are abſolutely neceſſary in order to our receiving, in a right manner, the *memorials* of the *body* and *blood* of the Lord, without which, our remembering his death at his table ever ſo conſtantly, and with the greateſt ſeeming devotion, and thinking of him, as our Saviour, with the moſt warm and vigorous affections, will by no means anſwer ſome of the chief and higheſt *purpoſes* of this holy inſtitution. For we cannot demonſtrate our gratitude to GOD, our heavenly father, nor to *Chriſt*, the gracious and adoreable Saviour of our ſouls, in any other way, than by *keeping his commandments*, and, eſpecially, by *loving one another, as he hath given us commandment*; by *walking worthy of the vocation, wherewith we are called, with all lowlineſs and meekneſs, with long-ſuffering, forbearing one another in love*; and indeavouring *to keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.*——And may *the God of patience, and conſolation, grant you to be like-minded, one towards another, according to Chriſt Jeſus*; *that ye may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify* GOD, *even the father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt. Wherefore receive ye one another*; *as Chriſt alſo received us*, with all our *weakneſſes* and *involuntary errors*, to *the glory* of the wiſdom, and mercy of GOD.

SER-

SERMON II.

The reaſons of Chriſt's *requiring* faith, *in order to his* miraculous cures.

LUKE viii. 48.

And he ſaid unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith *hath made thee* whole: *Go in peace.*

WHAT is *here* ſaid of the woman, that was cured of a bloody flux, by only touching the *hem* of our Saviour's garment, is frequently aſſerted by him upon *other* occaſions: *viz.* that the *miraculous cure*, which he performed, was owing to the patient's *faith*. We find, likewiſe, that *faith* was actually *required*, ſometimes, of the perſons themſelves, who were to be *healed*; at other times, of thoſe who *interceded* for them, and were to *atteſt* the *truth* of the miracle. This is a point of conſiderable difficulty. And a ſubtile oppoſer of chriſtianity, of a forward genius, and lively talents for miſrepreſentation and ridicule, will eaſily work up theſe circumſtances into a *ſuſpicion* of *fraud*; and make them paſs upon ſhallow thinkers, and ſuch as are inclined to cavil (whenever it may look

favourably on the ſide of infidelity) for *more* than a bare ſuſpicion, even a *direct* and *full proof* of craft and impoſture. There is not ſo much need of ſtraining and torturing here, in order to make the objection appear *plauſible*, as is proper in many other inſtances; where the *abuſe* is ſo *obvious*, and the turn given to principles and facts, at firſt ſight, ſo *unnatural*, that it will hardly paſs with the moſt *prejudiced*.

For let a man, no matter *how*, come to a fixed perſuaſion, that the chriſtian religion is *falſe*; and, in conſequence of this, let us ſuppoſe, that he reads the *hiſtory* of the *miracles* and *doctrines* of *Chriſt*, only to find *exceptions* againſt it, and to trace out, in every part of it, the *art* and cunning *management* of an *impoſtor*; and it will be immediately ſuggeſted to him, what uſe he muſt make of that part of our Saviour's conduct, which we are now conſidering. It will be repreſented, 'that he choſe none but per-'ſons of *weak judgments*, and *ſtrong imaginations*, to exerciſe his 'miraculous *power* of *healing* upon; and that *fancy alone* wrought 'the *cure*:' Or, elſe, 'that he knew, how to make a *right uſe* of 'the *ignorance* and *enthuſiaſm* of the multitude; and having firſt 'raiſed, in their minds, a *ſtrong conceit* of his being *able* to do *ex-'traordinary* things, and *heal* all manner of *diſeaſes* (before he 'pitched upon any of them, to be the *witneſſes* of his *miracles*) 'their *enthuſiaſm* made them think, that mighty *wonders* were '*really wrought*; and to perſiſt obſtinately in that *opinion*, notwith-'ſtanding all the *rational* or *forceable* methods, that were taken 'to reclaim them.'——By which means, many of the more *rude* and *illiterate* part of the people were *ſeduced*, and added to the number of Christ's *followers*. And, to give the greater credit to this reaſoning, the *effects* of enthuſiaſm, and the prodigious *force* of a warm imagination, are *magnified* to the utmoſt. Or, finally, the

the fact will be repreſented in this view, that the miracles of *Chriſt* were only *truſted* with thoſe of *his own party*; perſons that were *acquainted* with his *ſecret views*, and *confederates*, with him, in his *wicked deſign* of impoſing upon the world. So that, take it which way you pleaſe, their *atteſtation* can be of *no weight*; ſince it amounts to no more, than the teſtimony either of wild and fanciful *enthuſiaſts*; or, of abandoned and deſperate *impoſtors*. My buſineſs, in the remaining part of this diſcourſe, ſhall be,

FIRST, To ſhow the *weakneſs* of this *cavil*. And then,

SECONDLY, To give the true account of this part of our bleſſed Saviour's conduct, 'his requiring *faith*, in order to *healing*, and 'attributing the *miraculous cures*, which he performed, to *faith*;' from whence it will appear, that it was not, in the leaſt, *ſuſpicious* and *artful*, but *wiſe* and *rational*, and highly becoming the character he aſſumed, as the *meſſenger* and *prophet* of GOD.

FIRST, I am to conſider the *cavils*, that may be raiſed againſt this part of the ſacred hiſtory, and ſhow the *weakneſs* of them. And there is *one* circumſtance, that is, of itſelf, a ſufficient *anſwer* to all theſe *objections* (which I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak further of hereafter) *viz.* 'That our Saviour performed *ſeveral miracles*, 'where *faith* was *not at all required*; juſt as real objects of diſtreſs 'accidentally preſented themſelves before him.' In every caſe of this kind, as far as appears from the goſpel-hiſtory, the cure was a mere *voluntary* act of *benevolence* and *compaſſion*, granted without *ſollicitation*; without inſiſting upon any *condition*; and, very probably, to objects who had little or no *knowledge* of him. This ſingle remark, I ſay, intirely deſtroys the *force* of all the above-mentioned objections. For it is ſelf-evident. 'that, in all ſuch

'inſtances, he could make no advantage of *fancy* and *enthuſiaſm*; 'and the perſons, on whom the miracles were wrought, being 'ſuch as he lighted upon by *chance*, there is no poſſibility of a 'concerted fraud.' *Every reaſon*, that could induce him, in any *one* caſe, to act in *confederacy*, and practiſe on the *ignorance* and *credulity* of the people, muſt have determined him to take the ſame method, in *all* caſes; but as it is undeniable, on the contrary, that he exerted his miraculous power on the moſt *ſudden* and *caſual* emergencies, and upon all ſorts of objects *indiſcriminately*; this is as ſtrong a *preſumption*, as we can have of the truth of *any fact* whatever, that, when *he required faith*, it was not for the ſake of engaging, on his ſide, a ſtrong *imagination*, or working up the people to an enthuſiaſtic *perſuaſion* of his *power* to do miracles; or that he might have a plauſible pretence to confine, the *true ſecret* of his forged miracles, to his *own party*; but for other reaſons, perfectly conſiſtent with the *truth* and *honour* of his prophetic character—which, under the next head, will be more particularly explained. I might ſafely reſt the matter here; but ſhall, however, ſay a few things to each of the charges diſtinctly: only premiſing, that as *one* of the charges ſuppoſes the perſons, with whom our Saviour acted in the affair of his *miracles*, to be whimſical *enthuſiaſts*; and *another*, that they were wilful *impoſtors*; one of the two muſt be *given up*: becauſe they are *inconſiſtent ideas*, and neceſſarily *deſtroy* each other. 'If they were *enthu-* 'ſiaſts, they muſt *themſelves* have been *deceived*, and have *really* 'imagined a *divine* interpoſition and influence; if cunning *im-* 'poſtors, they muſt have *known*, that GOD was not at all *concern-* 'ed in the cauſe of *chriſtianity*, but that it was intirely a *falſehood* 'of their own *contriving*. Enthuſiaſts *believe*, that they are in 'the *right*; but it is included in the very notion of a deſigning 'impoſtor, that he certainly *knows* himſelf to be in the wrong.'

And

And yet theſe two things, of which, if the one be true, the other muſt neceſſarily be falſe, are urged, as the *occaſion* ſeems moſt *plauſible* for either, as conſiſtent topics of argument. But not to inſiſt longer on this, it will be eaſy to ſhew, with reſpect to the caſe now before us, that both the *charges* are *weak* and *groundleſs*.

If it be urged, in the FIRST place, that *Chriſt* choſe only perſons of *weak underſtandings*, and *ſtrong imaginations*, to exerciſe his *power* of *healing* upon; and *atteſt* the truth of his *miracles*---I would aſk, of *what ſervice* could that be to him? Let this queſtion be maturely weighed, and deliberately anſwered, according to the dictates of *right reaſon*, and not the ſuggeſtions of *prejudice*; which is never at a loſs for *evaſions*, and, the more, it is oppoſed, is always the more *unreaſonable* and *obſtinate*. The *miracles*, which our Saviour performed, were ſuch, as the *utmoſt force* of *fancy* could not reach. For when did it ever do ſuch mighty wonders, as *raiſing the dead*, and reſtoring *ſight to the blind?* When did it ever work *ſudden* and *inſtantaneous cures* of inveterate and malignant diſtempers? It may ſometimes, perhaps, *aſſiſt* the *operation* of proper means; but can it be proved, that, in any one difficult and dangerous caſe, it has cured *without means?* The bare mentioning theſe things is ſufficient, to make the objection ridiculous.

But we may go much farther than this. 'A ſtrong imagina-
'tion may be the cauſe of more *chearful* and *lively ſpirits*, and,
'conſequently, of great *uſe* in *ſome diſtempers*, where the *ſpirits*
'are chiefly *affected*; and this, if the *patient* was prepared with
'an expectation of ſomewhat *extraordinary*, he may, perhaps, be
'perſuaded to look upon as a *miracle*. But no man's fancy, if
'he was *born blind*, let it be as unbounded and vigorous as you
'pleaſe,

'pleaſe, can make him *ſee* objects ever ſo *indiſtinctly* and *confuſedly*; nor, conſequently, remove the leaſt part of his *diſorder*. So 'that he muſt certainly know, that the perſon who *pretended* to 'cure him, if the cure be not actually *performed*, is an *impoſtor*; 'nor is it poſſible for the ſtrongeſt imagination, joined with the 'utmoſt force of enthuſiaſm, to *deceive* him.'

HOWEVER, if we ſhould allow the *wonders*, that are attributed to the ſtrength of the *patient's own faith*; 'how ſhall we account 'for thoſe inſtances, in the goſpels, in which the *cure* is ſaid to be 'wrought, on account of *another man's faith?*' To ſuppoſe, that even the *imagination* of the *diſtempered* perſon himſelf can effect ſuch *prodigies* (with a view, to deſtroy the *credit* of our Saviour's *miracles*) is, in truth, to ſuppoſe things altogether as *ſtrange* as they, and as much beyond the known powers and laws of *nature*; and that they happen in *a natural way* too; which makes the abſurdity moſt groſly palpable: 'But that a man ſhould recover from 'a *dangerous ſickneſs*, have the *uſe* of his *limbs*, nay of his *reaſon*, 'reſtored to him, and gain *a new ſenſe*, by the ſtrength of ano-'ther man's faith, exceeds not only all meaſures of *credibility*, but 'even *poſſibility* itſelf.'

IT will therefore be urged, SECONDLY, that this was required with another view, *viz.* to work up the *enthuſiaſm*, and *credulity*, of the people to a proper pitch; that they might *themſelves believe*, and *report* confidently to *others*, miracles, that were never actually *performed*. To which I anſwer, that there is not the leaſt reaſon, for charging any of thoſe perſons with *enthuſiaſm*, but their *believing* the *miracles* of *Chriſt*, which is taking the very thing, in diſpute, for granted. *Fancy*, and *enthuſiaſm*, are *terms* commonly uſed;

uſed; but, I fear, very often without *ideas*. When men can *prove* nothing *directly*, theſe words are of great *ſervice* to them, to amuſe and miſlead the vulgar. And I am apt to ſuſpect, that the word enthuſiaſm is uſed, in this way, in the *preſent objection*; becauſe it has, really, nothing of *reaſon* or *common ſenſe* in it. 'For 'could enthuſiaſm, with all its *magic* powers, make thoſe, who 'brought the *paralitic* to our Saviour, imagine that there was a '*perfect cure* wrought upon him, if they ſaw him ly quite as *im*-'*potent* and *helpleſs* as before?' We have had pretences to *prophecy* in our own age; and, within the memory of many now living, one, of the leaders of that *ſect*, undertook to *foretell* his own *riſing* from the *dead*, at a certain determinate time; 'but though his *fol*-'*lowers* had a ſtrong *expectation* of this, could *enthuſiaſm* get the 'better of their *ſenſes*, and make them imagine that they *ſaw*, 'what they *ſaw not?* Nothing of this kind was pretended. Why, 'then, ſhould we ſuppoſe that *Mary's faith*, or, in the infidel 'ſtile, *enthuſiaſm*, had this effect, in the hiſtory of the *reſurrec*-'*tion* of *Lazarus?*' I might mention other of our Saviour's miracles, that cannot be aſcribed to any force of enthuſiaſm, without deſtroying the *evidence* of *ſenſe*. But I now proceed to the

SECOND thing propoſed, *viz.* to give the *true account* of this part of our Saviour's conduct, his requiring *faith* in order to *healing*, and attributing the *miraculous cures*, which he performed, to *faith*; from whence it will appear, that it had nothing in it of the *art*, and cunning *management* of an *impoſtor*, but was *wiſe* and *rational*, and highly *becoming* the character he aſſumed, as the *meſſenger* and *prophet* of GOD. Whoever conſiders the matter attentively will find, that there is a *wiſe view*, in almoſt *every circumſtance*, relating to moſt of our Saviour's *miracles*; each of which

was

was ſo *ordered*, as to anſwer, in the moſt effectual manner, the great *end* for which they were wrought, *confirming* and *ſupporting* the truth of his miſſion. For this reaſon it was, that he choſe to do ſo many *generous*, *beneficent*, and *uſeful* miracles, which carried, in them, plain *marks* not only of the ſuperior *ſkill* and *power*, but of the *goodneſs* of their author; and could not, without the greateſt abſurdity and moſt manifeſt contradiction to the nature of things, be looked upon as the *operations* of *evil ſpirits*. Though, by the way, 'it is not ſtrictly *eſſential* to the notion of a *divine* 'miracle, that it be, in itſelf, an act of *beneficence* and *goodneſs*; 'for if it be a demonſtration of *a power*, *ſuperior* to *that* of the 'immediate and viſible *agent*, it muſt be allowed to be a ſufficient 'proof of the *authority* of any religion that is *worthy of* GOD, and 'agreeable to the principles of *natural reaſon*.' However, the *uſefulneſs* of a miracle, though not abſolutely neceſſary, is without doubt a *corroborating* circumſtance, and renders the proof, *upon the whole*, more *clear* and *inconteſtable*.

AGAIN, another rule, obſerved by our Saviour, was this, not, generally, to ſeek for *occaſions* to work miracles, but to take them, juſt as they fell in his way *accidentally*. For the immediate end, of his coming into the world, was not to *amuſe* and *aſtoniſh* mankind, nor even to *heal diſeaſes*; but to exert his miraculous power, as an *evidence* and *teſtimony* to the *truth* of his religion: and conſequently next, and in ſubordination to this, which was his principal and ultimate view, we muſt ſuppoſe, that he would aim to act in that way, in which his *miracles* would be moſt *unexceptionable*; and not liable to the leaſt imputation of *colluſion* and *fraud*; which could not ſo well be avoided, as by their being *occaſional*, and wrought on ſudden and unexpected *emergencies*. And, I conceive,

it was upon the same account, that he required *faith* in order to his exerting his *miraculous power* of *healing*, namely, 'because it 'was the most likely method to secure the particular *design* of his 'miracles, which was to propagate the *belief* of his doctrine.' If this can be shewn, this part of his conduct will be so far from being a just ground of *objection* against him, that it will be an argument of his great wisdom; and, consequently, establish his prophetic character.

LET me only observe, before I proceed to the direct proof of this, 'that the *faith*, insisted on, was not *a belief of his being the* '*Messiah*; but only *of his ability to perform the particular miracle*, '*in order to which it was required*; and, moreover, that it does 'not always mean a *fixed* and *full persuasion* even of this, but, sometimes, only a *general expectation* of receiving relief from him; 'which was accepted (where persons had not had opportunities, of 'attaining a *stronger degree* of faith) though accompanied with 'considerable mixtures of *doubting* and *uncertainty*.' This appears to have been the case, particularly, with respect to the man, of whom we have an account in the ninth chapter of St. *Mark*'s gospel; who, upon our Saviour's saying to him—*if thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*; returned this answer, *Lord, I believe:* but that his faith was not a *full conviction*, but *unstable* and *wavering*, and attended with *doubts* and *suspicions*, is very naturally inferred from the words, which immediately follow—*Help thou my unbelief* *. This being premised, it must be considered,

* Ver. 23. 24.

In the FIRST place, 'That as *all*, or the *greateſt part* of thoſe, 'of whom *faith* was *required*, came to our Saviour *voluntarily*, 'and *applied* to him for a *cure*, nothing leſs could be expected 'from them, than that they had ſome *general notion* of his *power* 'to perform it.' This circumſtance muſt be always kept in view, *viz.* that theſe perſons, of their *own accord*, offered themſelves to *Chriſt*; and, therefore, when he put this queſtion to any of them, *Doſt thou believe?* the plain and obvious ſenſe of it is no more than this, 'Art thou come with an *honeſt* intention, with *ſincere* and '*upright* views, really expecting to receive *benefit* from me; or is 'it only on a *captious* errand, with a deſign to *enſnare* and *betray* 'me?' If thou believeſt that I am an *artful impoſtor*, who only make a *falſe pretence* to miracles, and have *not power* to do what thou deſireſt, thy requeſt is *diſingenuous* and *hypocritical*; and I think myſelf under no obligation to work *miracles*, for the ſatisfaction of every ſceptical *caviller*, who has a mind to *try* my *power*, either out of mere curioſity, or from corrupt and ſiniſter views.

HAD any man come to *Chriſt*, and told him honeſtly, 'That 'he had heard much of the *fame* of his *miracles*, but had not, himſelf, had any *opportunity* of being *convinced* of the *truth* of them; 'and then declared, that he could not ſay, he actually *believed* 'his miraculous *power* of *healing*, but only deſired, if he had this 'power, he would remove the *diſorders* he laboured under, and 'thereby do ſervice to one, who, though at preſent in a ſtate of '*doubt*, was of a *ſincere* mind, and *open* to *conviction*;' I ſee no reaſon to ſuppoſe, but that *Chriſt* would have *granted* his requeſt, nor is there any thing, in the new teſtament, that in the leaſt intimates the *contrary*. The aſſiſting ſuch a perſon, as this, would have been encouraging a frank, open, and ingenuous temper: but

the perſons of whom our Saviour required *faith*, came in quite *another manner*, and directly *implored* his *aid*; which altered the caſe intirely. For the leaſt that could be expected from the manner and circumſtances of their addreſs, provided they were *ſincere*, was what *Chriſt* actually inſiſted on; *viz.* that they entertained, at leaſt, ſome general notion of his being *able* to *relieve* them.

THIS appears moſt ſtrong and undeniable, in many of the inſtances recorded in the ſacred hiſtory; where the form of application was, *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canſt make me whole.* It would be needleſs to examine every particular caſe; and, therefore, I ſhall confine myſelf to one, which will ſet this whole matter in a clear light. St. *Matthew* informs us of two blind men, who followed our Saviour, crying out, and ſaying, *Son of* David *have mercy on us* *. When they were conducted to him, he put this queſtion to them (as he certainly might moſt *reaſonably*, when they had declared themſelves in ſuch ſtrong terms, as implied even their *believing him to be the promiſed Meſſiah*) *believe ye, that I am able to do this?* And upon their anſwering that they did believe, *he touched their eyes*, and *ſaid, according to your faith, be it unto you:* i. e. 'This act of mine ſhall be the *teſt* of your *integrity*; if your profeſſion has been *ſincere*, you ſhall be *healed*, if *not*, your *blindneſs* ſhall *continue*.' In this place, then, which may ſerve as a key for the right interpretation of other paſſages, it is paſt diſpute, that *faith* was only required for this *reaſon*, as it was a neceſſary evidence of a *virtuous* and *honeſt* mind.

AND if we examine the particular inſtances of *faith*, to which our Saviour attributed other of his *miraculous cures*, we ſhall find,

* Chap. ix. 27. 28. 29.

that they were not the *wild-flights* and *tranſports* of enthuſiaſm; but *ſober* and *rational*, and attended with great marks of *ſincerity*. The *Centurion*'s faith * was the reſult of *reaſon*, and *judicious reflection*, *viz.* that, if *Chriſt* was a true *prophet*, he could heal his ſervant at *a diſtance*; ſince he did every thing, of this kind, by the *power* of GOD, which is eſſentially preſent *every where*. The faith of the *woman* mentioned in the text, who, we may ſuppoſe, had *ſeen* many of our Saviour's miracles, was an unqueſtionable proof of her *integrity*; as ſhe manifeſted ſo high an opinion of his *character*, and extraordinary *power* of *healing*, not only in oppoſition to all her *national prejudices*; but againſt the *rulers*, and men of moſt eminent *note* at that time, and the general opinion of the *people*. And, finally, the *woman of* Canaan's *faith* † was grounded on the *wiſeſt*, and moſt *worthy*, apprehenſions concerning the DEITY; as the *father* of the univerſe, who *deſires* the *happineſs* of all his reaſonable creatures; though he may, for valuable purpoſes, honour *ſome* with *peculiar marks* of his favour, and confer upon them *extraordinary privileges*. In each of theſe caſes, 'faith was not an *eaſy*, *unreaſonable*, *credulity*, but the 'effect of *thought*, and *ingenuity*; and, conſequently, in itſelf, 'highly *commendable*, and deſerving to be particularly diſtinguiſh-'ed.'

FROM what has been ſaid, then, it appears upon the whole, that when our Saviour required *faith*, as the *condition* of performing miraculous *cures*, *that faith* included, in the true notion of it, *probity* of mind: and can any thing be more becoming the character of a *divine prophet*, than to order matters ſo, as that his *miracles*, at the ſame time that they anſwered their *proper uſe* of

* Matt. viii. 9. † Chap. xv. 27.

atteſt-

atteſting the truth of his doctrine, ſhould encourage and reward an honeſt, virtuous, diſpoſition, and, conſequently, promote the *great end* of all religion? Is there any thing exceptionable in this? On the contrary, is it not rather a *wiſe* ſcheme, that, inſtead of weakening adds new ſtrength and credit to *chriſtianity?* In what manner could *Chriſt* have acted more *worthy* of GOD, and more *honourable* to his own moral character? What could be more *agreeable* to the great end of the divine government, which is to advance the perfection and happineſs of the intelligent creation? To all which I may add, 'that it makes a beautiful *harmony*, be-'tween the *extraordinary*, and *ordinary*, courſe of providence, to 'ſuppoſe, that in *both*, there is *one uniform deſign* purſued; and 'that the greateſt, nobleſt, and moſt uſeful deſign, we can poſ-'ſibly conceive of; *viz.* countenancing and rewarding *integrity*, 'and virtue, and diſcouraging *corruption* and *hypocriſy*.'

BUT, SECONDLY, taking the matter, as it has been now explained, our Saviour's requiring *faith* of thoſe, who came to him to be *healed*, was the moſt likely way to ſecure the particular *end*, for which his miracles were performed, and eſtabliſh the *belief* of his religion. This *faith*, we have ſeen, was only inſiſted on, as it was a neceſſary evidence of an *honeſt* mind; and, that he ſhould require this *qualification*, cannot ſurely appear ſtrange to us, if we conſider, that *none*, but perſons of integrity and virtue, would probably be *converted* by his *miracles*, or *atteſt* the *truth* of them, publickly and reſolutely, in the face of oppoſition and danger. Men of corrupt and vicious diſpoſitions would have been likely, as the *Scribes* and *Phariſees* did, to give them a reproachful and malicious turn; or, however, would have made no ſcruple to *deny* the *facts*, when owning them interfered with their *worldly intereſts*, and expoſed them to *ſuffering*. The method therefore, which

which our Saviour took, was the moſt proper and effectual to ſecure *ſuch witneſſes* of his mighty works, as would bear a faithful and *ſteady* teſtimony; whereas had he wrought his miracles on captious deſigning cavillers, who could not be *depended upon*, nay, who would certainly have *contradicted* the report of his diſciples, to ſerve the views of their *ambition* and *covetouſneſs*, they muſt, in a great meaſure, have *loſt their uſe*. No wiſe man would throw away *common inſtructions* upon the obſtinate and incorrigible; or chooſe to *converſe* with ſuch, chiefly, upon whom there was ſcarce any probability of *doing good*; 'and why ſhould 'any be ſo unreaſonable, as to expect the very *ſame thing*, with 'relation to the *miracles* of *Chriſt*; which, being an *extraordi-* 'nary *means of conviction*, were much leſs to be *uſed*, where 'there was not a fair proſpect of anſwering ſome *valuable end* by 'them?'

SUFFER me further to add, that it is a moſt *idle* objection, which is ſometimes ſtarted upon other occaſions, *viz.* that we have an *account* of our Saviour's *miracles*, only from thoſe who were of his *own party*; and that this, being the *teſtimony* of *intereſted* perſons, is not to be *credited*; this, I ſay, is a moſt *idle* objection: 'For from *whom* would theſe men have the account— 'from his *enemies?*' Can it be imagined, that thoſe, who continued to *oppoſe* chriſtianity, would give a teſtimony againſt *themſelves*, and proclaim, to the world, the profligate *corruption* and *prejudice* of their hearts? Every one that *atteſts* the *truth* of the *miracles*, by which the religion of *Chriſt* is confirmed, at the ſame time, publiſhes his own *belief* of *them*; and, conſequently, of the *doctrine*, which they were intended to enforce: Theſe two things have a neceſſary connection, and cannot be ſeparated. So that, either, there can be no *credible teſtimony* to the truth of theſe

theſe *facts* at all, and the depoſitions of *eye-witneſſes*, and perſons of moſt *unqueſtionable veracity*, muſt not be admitted; which is deſtroying, at once, the credit and uſe of *teſtimony* in *all caſes*: Or, elſe, the miracles muſt be allowed, upon the teſtimony of *chriſtians themſelves*---' who were, indeed, in a ſenſe *intereſted*, *i. e.* ' (as they knew them to be *really performed*) engaged by all the ' regards due to *truth*, *honour*, and *virtue*, to propagate the *belief* ' of them; but, in every other reſpect, they were the moſt *diſin-* ' *tereſted witneſſes*, that ever appeared in the ſupport of *any cauſe*.'

LET me juſt add, in the THIRD place, that though what has been ſo largely conſidered appears to be *one* of the *rules*, which *Chriſt* had fixed for his conduct, it was not an *univerſal rule*. For there are *ſeveral caſes*, related in the goſpels, of *miraculous cures* performed, where, it does not appear, that any *qualifications* were required; or that our Saviour had any other *motive*, but the real *diſtreſs* of the object. Of this ſort, particularly, was the *cure* of *the impotent man*, at *the pool of* Bethesda *; and of *the man that was blind from his birth*, related by the ſame *evangeliſt* †. So that, upon laying theſe things together, we may form a pretty exact notion of our Lord's method of proceeding: ' That whenever a *diſ-* ' *eaſed miſerable object*, that would naturally excite *compaſſion* in a ' generous mind, *preſented* itſelf before him, the *benevolence* and ' *tenderneſs* of his nature always prompted him to *relieve* it; but ' when *direct application* was made to him, and he was *expreſsly* ' *deſired* to perform any *particular cure*, he required *faith* in the ' view, and for the wiſe reaſons, above explained; but, perhaps, ' chiefly, that he might ſecure *ſome faithful* and *ſteady witneſſes* to ' the *truth* of his *miracles*.'

* John, chap. 5. † Chap. 9.

AND

And ſince it appears, that every circumſtance, relating to the *miracles* of *Chriſt*, was ſo wiſely adapted to anſwer the great *end* of them; ſince the *miracles*, he wrought, were ſo *numerous*, and evidently above the known *powers* of *nature*, or *art*; nay, probably, beyond *any powers* communicated, or allowed, to *created agents*, ſuch as *raiſing the dead*; *public* miracles; and performed on great *multitudes at once*; and on *ſudden occurrences*, where there could be no ſuſpicion of a *contrived impoſture*; and, generally, moſt *uſeful* and *beneficent* miracles, which were not mere oſtentations of a ſuperior *intelligence*, and *power*, but demonſtrated, likewiſe, the *goodneſs* of their author; and, above all, ſince his whole *doctrine* is the nobleſt improvement of *reaſon*, of *morality* and *natural religion*, and calculated to raiſe the mind to an exalted *heighth* of *virtue*, and for the advancement both of *public*, and *private*, happineſs (which is the *ſtrongeſt recommendation* of it, not excepting *miracles themſelves*, to a conſiderate and well-diſpoſed mind)—let all theſe conſiderations confirm us in the *belief*, and *profeſſion*, of *chriſtianity*. And let us take care, to add, to our faith, *ſincerity*, and the *practice* of thoſe *great* and *uſeful virtues*, which our holy religion recommends. 'For to *act up* to the *excellent rules*, 'which our Saviour, in the name of God, has propoſed for our 'conduct—is only another phraſe—for advancing the *rectitude*, 'and *honour*, and *purity* of our nature; nay, our *ſupreme*, moſt 'ſolid and *durable happineſs*.'

The following ſhort reflections are naturally grafted, on the foregoing diſcourſe.

First, That there are *no circumſtances*, attending the *propagation* of the moſt important truths, but what, if they are miſunder-

ſtood or maliciouſly repreſented, will yield, to minds properly diſpoſed, a *ſpecious* and *plauſible objection* againſt the *truths themſelves*.——*Secondly*, That it is the indiſpenſable duty, of all *fair* and *honeſt* inquirers, never to reject the *general proofs* and *evidences* of *religion*, in any caſe, on account of *remote* and *incidental difficulties*.——*Thirdly*, That a prejudice *entertained*, and *cheriſhed*, and which *ſeeks* for *occaſions* to *confirm* and *fortify* itſelf, argues an *unnatural* diſpoſition and ſtate of mind——plainly *unnatural* to the *mind* of *man*, becauſe the love of truth is *natural*—and as the whole, of this *ill conduct* of the underſtanding, is a *monſtrous* piece of *ſelf-deceit*; ſince *truth* is, in *itſelf*, the *ſame*; and the *terror* of it (if we are ſtill reſolved, that it *ſhall be terrible:* for that wholely depends upon *ourſelves*) is, and muſt be, unchangeably and for ever, the ſame.——And now I have touched upon the ſubject, of *prejudices* againſt *religion*,—let me obſerve farther, that there is no *bad ſoil* in which they *breed* ſo faſt, and are ſo ſoon *rooted*, and *fixed*, as that of *vanity*, and *luxury*.——In the *laſt* place—As our *ſenſe*, of the evidences and proofs of true religion is more *clear* and *unclouded*; it will always be juſtly expected, both by God and man, that our *virtues* ſhould ſhine in proportion.

SERMON III.

Of the number of thoſe that ſhall be ſaved.

LUKE xiii. 23. 24.

Then ſaid one unto him, Lord, are there few that ſhall be ſaved? And he ſaid unto them, Strive to enter in at the ſtrait gate: for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.

THE perſon, who propoſed this queſtion to our bleſſed Saviour, ſeems neither to have been a *wiſe*, nor a *religious*, man.——Not *wiſe*, becauſe impertinently inquiſitive about a point of no moment, to the cauſe of *virtue*, and the *happineſs* of mankind; and becauſe he attempted to degrade the divine *inſtructor*, and *reformer*, of the world, into the low character of a revealer of *ſecrets*, to gratify *vain curioſity*; and either to aſtoniſh and confound weak minds by contradicting, or do them a far greater, and perhaps an irreparable miſchief, by confirming, their imbibed and deeply-rooted *prejudices*.---Nor, in all

all probability, was he under any ſerious *impreſſions* of *religion*; becauſe, then, the *firſt* and moſt *natural* enquiry, that he could be prompted to make, would have been this: What muſt *I do to be ſaved?* What was it to him, whether *greater*, or *ſmaller*, would be the number upon the whole, if he *himſelf* was not intitled to ſalvation? And yet about the laſt, the only thing of importance and uſe to himſelf, he appears not to have been at all *ſolicitous*: and as to the firſt, he ſeemed rather inclined that it ſhould be decided to the *hurt*, the *miſery*, the *utter perdition*, than to the *good*, of mankind in general: and therefore cannot be ſuſpected of having *neglected himſelf*, from the overflowings and ſtrong impulſes of *univerſal benevolence*; but as being deſirous only to be reſolved in a mere matter of *ſpeculation*, without a due regard to his own, or to the common final happineſs of the rational creation.

Our Lord, therefore, conſidered him in this light, and treated him as a perſon of *inſignificance*; of a careleſs unſettled temper, and not eaſily reduced to ſedate thought, and reſolutions of *perſonal virtue* (which every individual muſt have, and diligently cultivate, or there is no poſſibility, that mankind, upon *the whole*, ſhould be *virtuous*) our Lord, I ſay, in the reply which he thought fit to make, did not *addreſs* himſelf, particularly, to the perſon who propoſed the queſtion, as having very little hope of his *improvement*; but to the people in general, who attended him---*He ſaid unto* THEM, to his whole audience without diſtinction (ſo the *evangeliſt* expreſly informs us) *ſtrive to enter in at the ſtrait gate: for many, I ſay unto you, will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able.*

It was *Chriſt*'s frequent practice, when queſtions of mere *curioſity* were propoſed to him, to divert the diſcourſe to ſomething

that was *ſolid*, and of *real importance*. And, by acting thus, he maintained the *dignity*, and took the moſt effectual method to anſwer the ultimate *end*, of his divine miſſion—which was not to aſtoniſh the giddy trifling multitude, by reſolving *intricate queſtions*; not to feed an inſatiate boundleſs humour of impertinence, by unravelling *myſteries*, and revealing *dark events*, which it is not the buſineſs of mankind to be acquainted with; not to *amuſe*, but to *inſtruct* and *edify*, his hearers. He well knew the wide difference that there is, between the *ſpeculation* and *practice* of religion; that the *one* may not only ſubſiſt without the *other*, but is frequently an *obſtruction* and a *hinderance* to it: in ſo much, that the *wantonly* and *over-ſolicitouſly inquiſitive*, is ſeldom found to be a right *moral*, temper. It is apt to be *preſumptuous*, *heated*, *violent*, *raſh* in cenſure; of *confined* and *partial* benevolence; a *diſturber* of the *peace* of chriſtian ſocieties; and even a *decrier* and *vilifier* of *virtue itſelf* (the moſt reſplendent image of God, and the ſupreme glory of angels and men) in compariſon of a mere *notional orthodoxy*, which has not a *grain* of intrinſic worth in it, nor ſuppoſes the *leaſt degree* of true merit, in the perſon who is poſſeſſed of it.

For theſe reaſons, our bleſſed Saviour, in various other caſes too tedious to be particularly recited, has obſerved the ſame rule of conduct, as in the inſtance mentioned in the text—*Grafting* profitable inſtructions on inquiries, that of themſelves could yield no profit; and, inſtead of giving the *ſanction* of his ſacred authority to *either ſide* of the queſtion, in abſtruſe and puzzling *theories* (which would have encouraged *vanity*, the love of *novelty*, and an *unfixed reſtleſs* temper, that delights to rove from one *trifle* to another) inſtead of oppoſing, and expreſsly condemning this ſtrange *thirſt* after *curioſities*, which might have infuſed ſtrong prejudices againſt himſelf

ſelf—chooſing rather to give it a more *tacit* and *gentle* rebuke, by neglecting to countenance and indulge it, and endeavouring to engage the attention of his hearers, to the immutable obligations of piety in all circumſtances, and guard againſt thoſe errors, and pernicious vices, to which, he foreſaw, from the preſent wrong bent and diſpoſition of their minds, that they were in a peculiar manner *expoſed*.

I SHALL only add, by way of introduction, that what is propoſed, by the *queriſt* in the text, as a point to be *decided*—and what *Chriſt*, though it was directly offered to his *deciſion*, did not *determine*—is repreſented, in theſe remote ages from primitive chriſtianity, as a fundamental article of *faith*. We are not only to believe, as a *firſt principle*, on which the intire conſtitution of the goſpel is formed, that *few will be ſaved*; but that it is to be aſcribed to the ſole poſitive *appointment of* GOD, that the number is ſo *ſmall*—The *creator* formed them for, the *father* devoted them to, *miſery*. But I may have occaſion to ſpeak more of this hereafter; and ſhall, therefore, now proceed to propoſe the ſubjects of my following diſcourſe.

IN the FIRST place, then, I would obſerve from the text, that it is the *wiſdom*, and ought to be the *chief concern*, of every man, to mind the things, that immediately relate to his *own duty* and *happineſs*; and not to be anxious about reſolving *intricate queſtions*, not to miſemploy his zeal about *uſeleſs ſpeculations*, that have no connexion with either.

SECONDLY, That *prejudices* of *education* (and the ſame may be ſaid of any other, that have been fondly cheriſhed, and are become deeply fixed) will make a man warmly eſpouſe, earneſtly contend for,

for, and wiſh to have it in his power to eſtabliſh, the *truth* of principles, that are abhorrent to *nature*, and which *reaſon*, and *humanity*, moſt ſtrongly prompt him to diſclaim.

THIRDLY, From our Saviour's dropping the queſtion, propoſed in the text, without giving any direct *reply* to it, we are naturally led to make this remark, that, if it could be *reſolved*, there would be no *uſe* in it; it could only ſerve to *diſcourage* and *terrify*, and torment the mind with diſtreſſing *doubts*, and *ſuſpicions*; but could afford no one urgent *reaſon*, no generous *motive*, to the practice of piety and virtue.

IN the LAST place, it is clearly intimated in this paſſage, that to maintain a courſe of *uncorrupted* and *ſteady* virtue, ſo as to enjoy the natural advantages and comforts of it here, and its glorious rewards hereafter, is a work of great *difficulty*.

THE FIRST obſervation, from the next, is this, that it is the *wiſdom*, and ought to be the chief *concern*, of every man, to mind the things, that immediately relate to his *own duty and happineſs*; and not to be anxious about reſolving *intricate queſtions*, not to miſemploy his zeal about *uſeleſs ſpeculations*, that have no connexion with either.—If he endeavours to *learn* what his duty is, in all its branches, and *diſcharges* it faithfully, he will ſupport the *dignity* of his moral character, and fill, with *propriety*, and *honour*, his place and ſtation in the univerſe. He will act like one, who conſiders himſelf, as ordained to *execute* a *part* of the univerſal ſcheme of *providence*; by a *failure* in which, its beauty, and harmony, and admirable order upon the whole, will be *blemiſhed* and *defaced*. He will be amiable, and approved of by GOD and man;

man; and an excellent, and uſeful, member of the univerſal community.

And from this right conſideration, and diligent performance, of his *duty*, his chief *happineſs* ſprings; ſo *wiſe*, and *gracious*, is the conſtitution of nature: nor can *private* happineſs be attained, by a regular and ſtrict courſe of *perſonal* virtue, without promoting, conſiderably, the *public* good. Indeed, the *whole ſtock* of *common happineſs* is furniſhed, by each individual being aſſiduous, and inflexible, in purſuing his *own true happineſs*. And as it is a ſacred and immutable branch of duty, to every man, it muſt ever be the firſt, the moſt exquiſite and tranſporting, of all his *pleaſures*, to be beneficent and generous; to overlook the ſcanty narrow limits of his *own intereſt*, and endeavour, to the utmoſt of his ability and influence, to make reaſonable and manly pleaſures and joys *circulate*; to aſſuage the troubles and cares of the *afflicted*, to enlighten the *gloomy benighted*, to raiſe the *diſconſolate*, and aid and fortify the *timorous*, and *irreſolute* ſpirit: and, as far as its power extends, to baniſh all *diſtreſs*, and *miſery*, from both the *rational* and *ſenſitive* creation. So that to aſſert, that it is the *wiſdom*, and ſhould be the *chief concern*, of every man, to mind the things, that immediately relate to his *own duty and happineſs*—is not to recommend a *mercenary* virtue, or the cultivation of any *low* and *ſelfiſh* paſſions; but pointing out the ſureſt path, if each perſon acted his part wiſely and conſcientiouſly, to the univerſal *rectitude*, and univerſal *good*, of human nature. *Extenſive ſchemes* of public uſefulneſs—*magnificent efforts* to put all ſuch worthy deſigns in execution—a noble, communicative, ſympathiſing, and expanded *ſpirit*, of *benevolence*, would animate and unite the whole race of mankind.

Thus

THUS *employed* man appears with dignity; *important*, *exalted*, *god-like*.—But what a mean diminutive figure does he *ſink* into, how *ſhrunk*, and *withered*, and *ſtripped* of all the glories both of his reaſon and morality, when, inſtead of indeavouring to improve in the juſt knowledge of *himſelf*, of his *fellow-creatures*, of GOD, of the *relation* he bears to the univerſal ſpirit, and the ſyſtem of created and dependent natures, and the obligations of *duty*, neceſſarily reſulting from thence; he devotes himſelf, chiefly, to the *reſolution* of queſtions that are *inexplicable*, or to the diſcuſſing ſuch *idle* ſpeculations, as are abſolutely inſignificant, to all the purpoſes of *virtue*, and *human happineſs!* He is now degenerated into a *compoſition* of mere *amuſement* and *vanity*; and no wiſdom, no honour, no uſefulneſs, can be expected from him.

HAD the generality of mankind been attentive only, or principally, to the great points of their indiſpenſible *duty*, and *ſovereign good*, infinite other miſchiefs, beſides darkneſs and confuſion of underſtanding, would have been prevented. They would, probably, have united in *one ſcheme*, as to the *eſſential* parts of true religion. But *curioſity* has led them into *by-paths*, where they have been bewildered and loſt in endleſs mazes: An over-confident and heated *zeal*, for ſpeculations, has diverted their attention, and regards, from *true religion:* Has fomented, and propagated, a ſpirit of *inſolence*, and mutual *contempt:* Has occaſioned dreadful violations of *charity*, ſhameful neglects of common *juſtice*, and, frequently, rendered the moſt *pious* more wild, and fierce, and hurtful, than the *prophane* and *vicious* tribe of men; and the *chriſtian* more blood-thirſty, and a more mercileſs implacable enemy to *chriſtians*, than either the *heathen*, or the *mahometan*—And is it worth our while, thus to *defile* our own minds, to *lay waſte*

waſte all our virtues, and to be the *inſtruments* of ſuch deplorable diſtreſs, and confuſion, in the world, for ſuch a *blind wanton* ſpeculation, as that mentioned in the text; whether *few*, or *many*, *ſhall be ſaved?* Scarce any debates, which have diſhonoured and diſtracted the *chriſtian church*, have been of more importance than this; which, I ſhall have occaſion to ſhew under one of the following heads, is of *no manner of importance*.

LET us, therefore, all reſolve, how *diſagreeing*, and *various* ſoever, our apprehenſions may be, in inferior and more doubtful points, to be harmonious in a ſtrictly *moral conduct*, and in the offices of *humility* and *peace*. *Speculate* with diffidence and modeſty; *practiſe* with reſolution, and an undaunted firmneſs of mind. Let queſtions, that are ſubtile and merely curious, be examined intirely as matters of *amuſement*, and not as the *important buſineſs*, the *great concern*, of human life. *Believe* with caution, *differ* with moderation, be *ſupremely ſolicitous* about the things, by which all may be *edified*; and reſolve, in all events, to be candid and condeſcending, and to *love one another:* for GOD *is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in* GOD, *and* GOD *in him* *. I now proceed to the

SECOND obſervation, which is this, that *prejudices* of *education* (and the ſame may be ſaid of any *other*, that have been fondly cheriſhed, and are become deeply fixed) will make a man warmly eſpouſe, earneſtly contend for, and wiſh to have it in his power to eſtabliſh, the *truth* of principles, that are abhorrent to *nature*, and which *reaſon*, and *humanity*, moſt ſtrongly prompt him to diſclaim.—I mention *prejudices* of *education*, particularly, not only,

* 1 John iv. 16.

becauſe they are the univerſal *charm*, that, in ſome meaſure, *infatuates* and *ſtupifies* the human underſtanding, and, beyond any thing elſe, are the *parent* of *error*, and *implicit faith*; but, becauſe the perſon, who propoſed that *impertinent* queſtion to our bleſſed Saviour, which is mentioned in the text, did it, in all probability, from the prevalence and force of this early implanted *prejudice*.——As a *Jew*, his notions ran very *high*, for the *prerogatives* of the *ſeed* of *Abraham*: they were not only eminently diſtinguiſhed, above other nations, but the *only part* of the *rational* workmanſhip of GOD, which he had not abſolutely *rejected*, and *abandoned* to ſlavery and ruin. This was then the opinion and belief of the degenerate *offspring* of *the father of the faithful*; 'but 'neither the *ſentiment* of *nature*, nor the *voice* of GOD.'

HOWEVER, as this *Jew* was actually thus deluded and prepoſſeſſed, his intention in the inquiry which he made, we may reaſonably preſume, was chiefly, if not only, this; to have this *prejudice*, which was grafted in his mind in his *education*, confirmed by the expreſs *ſanction* of one, who pretended to be the prophet and meſſenger of GOD—unleſs we ſuppoſe, that he deſigned it as a captious enſnaring queſtion, to deſtroy, intirely, the character and reputation of *Chriſt* with his bigotted countrymen, 'if he 'preſumed to preach the *univerſal mercy* of GOD, and the *ſalvable* 'condition of *all mankind*.' Here, then, we have the example of a man, who ſeemed to *wiſh* to have it eſtabliſhed for *a truth*, that *but few of his own ſpecies would be ſaved*; and all the reſt, infinitely the *greater* number, conſigned over to everlaſting and remedileſs miſery.

'COULD *reaſon* dictate ſuch an *unnatural* deſire? Could *huma-* '*nity* ſupport itſelf under the thought, of its being the *actual*,

'*determined*, and *unavailable* ſtate of things? Would not GOD
'then appear, in the horrid light of *a tyrant?* Is not this the
'moſt *diſaſtrous and terrible cataſtrophe*, that can poſſibly be pre-
'ſented to the human imagination? *If it was a truth*, would
'not a man of kind *affections*, of generous and friendly *ſympathies*,
'chooſe, rather than that it ſhould be explained and certainly
'made *known* to him, to have it hid and buried in impenetrable
'and everlaſting *darkneſs?* Can he be, in the leaſt degree, fond of a
'doctrine, ſo exceſſively *malevolent?* Can he allow himſelf to *exult*
'in the *tyranny* of the creator, and the ſtupendous *ruin* of his crea-
'tures? This is far from being the direction and biaſs of human na-
'ture, which is always ſhocked (while it retains its *firſt* right diſpo-
'ſitions) when it hears of any great *miſeries*, which it cannot *re-*
'*lieve*, of any *evils*, which it cannot *mitigate*.——But *religious*
'*prejudices* can reconcile the mind to ſuch ſcenes of gloomineſs,
'and terror.—What evidence of *reaſon*, then, and what force of
'*nature*, muſt they not have power to darken, and controul!'

THE THIRD remark, in the order of diſcourſe at firſt propoſed, was, that from our Saviour's dropping the queſtion which was put to him in the text, without giving any direct *reply* to it, we naturally infer, that if it could be *reſolved*, there would be no *uſe* in it; it could only ſerve to *diſcourage* and *terrify*, and torment the mind with diſtreſſing *doubts* and *ſuſpicions*; but could afford no one urgent *reaſon*, or generous *motive*, to the practice of piety and virtue. The doctrine of an abſolute *divine predeſtination* of all events, was, it muſt be allowed, generally received in the antient *eaſtern* nations; as it *continues* to be at this day. Whether the *Jew*, who addreſſed himſelf to our Lord in the text, held this opinion, can be determined with no *certainty*. There is, indeed, no probable ground, on which to raiſe ſuch a *conjecture*; becauſe, as was ob-

ſerved before, he might be induced to it by another ſentiment, that was undeniably a *national* Jewiſh *prejudice*, *viz.* that *the election of grace*, the *predeſtination* to *ſpecial mercy*, was limited to *their branch* of *Abraham*'s family, excluſive of all the reſt of mankind.

'MOSES, the founder of their religion, could not poſſibly have 'eſpouſed this doctrine of *abſolute decrees*, fixing the unalterable 'ſtate of *each individual* in every nation, when he ſaid to all the '*Iſraelites* without diſtinction—*And now I call* GOD *to witneſs* '*againſt you this day, that I have ſet before you life and death,* '*bleſſing and a curſe*; *therefore chooſe life*.—For was it in their '*power* to *chooſe life*, who were irreverſibly *determined* to eternal '*death* and *miſery ?*' The thing itſelf is a contradiction; and the exhortation, conſidered in this light, abſurd even to extravagance.

BUT if *predeſtination*, in general, had really been the univerſal *belief* of the *Jews*, in our Saviour's time, and a plain fundamental article in the *doctrine* of *Moſes*; 'it could not have been inferred 'from this alone, that *the greater number were devoted to miſery*: 'both the *wiſdom* and *goodneſs* of GOD, upon all the principles 'which the light of nature ſuggeſts, are ſtrongly on the *other ſide* 'of the queſtion.' A particular poſitive *revelation*, therefore, was *here* neceſſary; or there could be no *rational* faith. Our Lord's declaration, upon another occaſion, that *ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*—is no argument, 'that though this was true in *peculiar* circum-'ſtances of *prejudice*, *diſtreſs*, and *perſecution*, it muſt hold like-'wiſe true, with reſpect to the *ultimate fate* of mankind in gene-'ral, in more *eaſy* and *quiet times*, and more *favourable* and *pro-'pitious* to the cauſe of virtue:' But the *contrary* may rather be

preſumed. And we may ſafely reſt in this rational and juſt concluſion, 'that if but, comparatively, *few are ſaved*, when the cauſe 'of virtue is *deſerted*, *diſgraced*, *oppreſſed*; *many more* may attain 'to this bleſſed and deſirable privilege, when religion is allowed 'to take its *free ſcope*, when it is acknowleged to be *reaſonable*, '*amiable*, *uſeful*, *neceſſary*; and when there is no *impediment*, to 'the univerſal cultivation and improvement of it, but what ſprings 'from the inordinate paſſions, and voluntary corruption, of human 'nature.' So that, for any thing that *Chriſt* has aſſerted to the contrary (which refers wholly to *extraordinary* inſtances) in the *common* diſtinction and train of human life, thoſe who are *ſaved may be* the *ſuperior number*. I preſume not to decide, that this is the abſolute *truth* of the caſe; but only to ſhew, that the contrary *cannot* be evinced, on the principles either of *nature*, or *revelation*.

And if it *could*, what *valuable purpoſe* would it anſwer? 'In 'the opinion of *Chriſt*, moſt certainly *none at all*, becauſe he 'thought it *beneath* him, as a prophet, concerned for the *truth* of 'God, and the propagation and advancement of *religion*, to take 'the *leaſt notice* of it. He *muſt* have done it, had it been an *im*-'*portant* enquiry; he *could not* do it, as it was an *impertinent* one. '*He did not*; and therefore, if we reverence his *wiſdom*, and 'think ourſelves obliged to pay any deference to his *authority*, 'neither ought we to concern ourſelves about it. *Reaſon* teaches 'us, abſtract from all regards which we owe to *Chriſt* as a 'prophet, that we *ought not*, becauſe the *ſtate* of man, and the '*duty* of man, will be unalterably the *ſame*, in whatever manner 'this queſtion is *reſolved*.'——If it be *ſtill* in our *power* to be *ſaved*, notwithſtanding the operation, the combined and moſt efficacious operation, of all *external cauſes*, the certain exiſtence of

theſe

theſe cauſes, and even the knowledge of the *actual event* (could that be obtained) with reſpect to particular perſons, can neither *diminiſh*, nor *increaſe*, this power: and our *duty* muſt be, to exert ourſelves in ſuch a manner, as if the whole, depended upon *ourſelves*. —If, on the contrary, *ſalvation* be *not* in our power—all *ſchemes*, all *efforts*, are vain; *inactivity* is, then, our *duty*, *unconcern* and *ſtupidity*, are our preſent *happineſs*. If but *few* ſhall *be ſaved*, merely through a *divine decree*, it muſt be ſcarce poſſible for us to know, whether we ourſelves are of that *ſelected number*; this, therefore, can open to us no other ſcene, but that of irremediable *deſpair* and *horror*. If it could be revealed to us, by the infallible *preſcience* of the DEITY, it would, perhaps, damp and intimidate every holy and pious *reſolution*; uneaſy and ſuſpicious doubts would *clog* and *retard* all the inward *ſprings* of action; and *the fear, of not ſucceeding at laſt*, would ſlacken our very *endeavours* to ſucceed.

'AN *affrighted* mind is rendered, by means of its inward terror, *confuſed*, and *impotent*: nothing, therefore, can inſpire that *free* and *undaunted* ſpirit (which is the neceſſary *ſupport* of an exalted and improving virtue) but the firm *belief*, that GOD *would have all men to be ſaved*; without engaging in a fruitleſs diſquiſition, what *the number will be upon the whole*, but confining our thoughts, intirely, to the indiſpenſable *terms* and *conditions* of ſalvation.' And, from hence, it unavoidably follows, that the *inſiſting* upon *ſuch doctrines* as the above-mentioned, about which our Lord, when directly conſulted, would not *explain* himſelf, can hardly be imagined, by a truly thoughtful and conſiderate man, to be *a proper way* either to promote the *purpoſes* of *religion in general*; or to anſwer the *peculiar deſign* of the *chriſtian inſtitution*. But,

IN

In the laſt place, it is clearly and ſtrongly intimated in the text—that to maintain a courſe of *uncorrupted* and *ſteady* virtue, ſo as to enjoy the natural advantages and comforts of it here, and its glorious rewards hereafter, is a work of great *difficulty*.—To *begin* a courſe of *religion*, when *contrary habits* have been long eſtabliſhed, requires the utmoſt *force* of *reſolution*; becauſe, in this caſe, the ſinner is held under ſuch *heavy ſervitude*, that he has ſcarce *a will* to *attempt* a reformation, and, ſeldom, *ſteadineſs* and *conſtancy* of mind, to *execute* his languid, haſty, extorted purpoſes. Demonſtrate to him the *infamy* of his irregular courſes; and that they tend to impair his *health*, conſume his *ſubſtance*, depreſs his *underſtanding*; and, of conſequence, to bring *diſquietude* and *miſery* on him in this world, and eternal *ruin* in the next.—Add, to theſe *perſonal* inconveniencies, others of a more *public* nature; that they injure the *innocent*, diſtreſs his *family*, incroach on his neighbours *rights*, and are inconſiſtent with all *good order*, and *happineſs*, in ſociety—and let theſe things be diſplayed, and urged, with the utmoſt force of *reaſon*, and all the arts of *eloquence* and *perſuaſion*—they may, perhaps, raiſe ſome *preſent* ſlight emotion, but, in the main, he continues *inflexible*, and *deaf* to all the remonſtrances of *reaſon* and *intereſt*. So that the *habits*, which he has contracted, in effect deſtroy his capacities of *thinking* and *reaſoning*, and diveſt him of his *intelligent* and *moral* powers. And this is, not only, an undeniable part of *the hiſtory* of the degenerate wicked world; but ſprings from the very *nature* of things.

It ariſes, in a great meaſure, from the *general nature* of *habits*. For it muſt require conſtant care and application, when the mind has been, for a long time, *bent* one way, to *recover* it to its original

original biaſs, and *alter* it to a quite different direction. When any inclinations, though of our *own raiſing*, are become *habitual*, they are ingrafted, as it were, into the *complexion* of the ſoul; mixed with its very *frame*; and, conſequently, as hard to be *rooted out*, as thoſe which are *natural*. Beſides, habits of vice have this *peculiar* unhappy circumſtance attending them, that they are adapted to the *ſenſitive* part in man, the motions of which are more *warm* and *impulſive*, they ſtrike more *forcibly*, and are more *univerſally* attended to, than *religious* and *moral* conſiderations; and being, upon that account, directly repugnant to the *underſtanding*, they cloud its *light*, and weaken its *authority*; and render men averſe to *ſerious conſideration* (the only poſſible foundation of *true repentance*) becauſe it *terrifies* the conſcience burdened with guilt, and looking *inward* repreſents a hideous picture of *deformity*.

To which we may add, that the very *difficulty*, of ſubduing evil habits, has ſo *formidable* an aſpect, that it *diſcourages* ſinners from attempting it. The watchfulneſs, inward conflict, and mortification, that attend it, entirely baffle their *faith*, *half-formed*, and *fluctuating* reſolutions. So that though they may be ſo fully convinced, of the *neceſſity* of a reformation, as to determine, in general, to correct what is *amiſs* in their temper and conduct; they can ſcarce acquire ſufficient *ſtrength* of ſpirit, to ſet about the *immediate execution* of it; but defer it, to ſome *uncertain time* hereafter: not conſidering what is obvious to common ſenſe, and confirmed by the univerſal experience of mankind, that, by this means, they render their *habits* more *ſtubborn* and *unconquerable*.

When

When this is the deplorable caſe, men are never likely to be brought to *repentance*, till ſomething or other, of an *alarming* nature, happens, that *rouſes* the mind out of its *lethargy*, and *forces* it to *think*. But this is infinitely *precarious*, and not at all to be *depended* on: From whence we ſee, what foundation there is, for that ſtrong paſſage of the prophet *Jeremiah*, where, in a lofty figurative ſtile, he compares the breaking ſtrong and rooted habits of evil, to things abſolutely *impoſſible*.—*Can*, ſays he, *the* Ethiopian *change his ſkin, and the* leopard *his ſpots?* then *may ye alſo do good, who are* accuſtomed *to do evil* *.

The following *difficulties*, with reſpect to the exerciſe of an *exact*, *uncorrupted*, and *inflexible* virtue, muſt be allowed with reſpect to the *whole human race*; and, in them, is contained the whole of the moral *diſtreſs* and *weakneſs* of human nature. Its *animal paſſions* are *ſtrong* and *turbulent*; apt to *oppoſe*, and, upon a little *indulgence*, to *over-rule* the dictates of *reaſon*. An unhappy *conſtitution* of body is a *load*, and an *oppreſſion*, upon the mind; and the various *diſorders*, to which the body is ſubject, cloud, and interrupt, the *freedom* and *livelineſs* of its operations. Objects of *ſenſe* make powerful *impreſſions* upon it; and it is, every where, ſurrounded with numberleſs *temptations*: *Evil examples*, oftentimes, *corrupt* it early; *indolence enervates* its faculties; *partial views*, of things, betray it into dangerous *errors*; and the *avocations*, and *cares*, of life *diſtract* it. And, finally, *popularity* is apt to *enſlave* it; corrupt *cuſtoms* to enure it to a habit of *vanity* and *exceſs*; and evil *company* to inſtil into it *dangerous principles*, and extirpate its natural *ſenſe* of good and evil.

* Jer. xiii. 23.

But let me obſerve, for the concluſion of the whole, that the greateſt *difficulties* of religion are, yet, *poſſible* to be ſurmounted. This is almoſt evident to a demonſtration: becauſe we find, that there are no other *averſions*, no other *difficulties*, no other confirmed and moſt inveterate *habits*, but what may be altogether *controuled* and *ſubdued*, by the *ardor* and *ſpirit* of human *reſolution:* And we cannot ſurely think, that our nature is ſo *odd*, ſo *defective*, a compoſition, that it can conquer *every* diſinclination, ſurmount *every* difficulty, and reform *every* wrong habit, but what is of a *religious* kind. It is an incredible ſuppoſition in itſelf; and moſt injurious to the wiſdom and goodneſs of our Creator.—Mankind are capable of *underſtanding* their duty, and of *impreſſing*, upon their conſciences, an efficacious *ſenſe*, and *conviction*, of its infinite importance; and there is *no cauſe* in nature, that can *neceſſarily* prevent their *acting*, according to their inward apprehenſion and judgment of things: and the *ſame reſolution*, with which, we often ſee, that they break through *other* ſtubborn habits, and ſuſtain *ſurpriſing*, and almoſt *incredible*, conflicts, muſt, according to the courſe of nature, gain them the *victory* over *any habits* whatſoever; and raiſe them to a pitch, of *ſublime* and *exemplary goodneſs*—Beſides that they are taught, by *nature*, and expreſsly directed by the *chriſtian revelation*, to implore the gracious *help* of God, who is moſt affectionately and tenderly concerned, for the *rectitude*, and *happineſs*, of *all* his intelligent and moral *offspring*; and has therefore promiſed, to give *the holy Spirit, to them that aſk him* *.

* Luke xi, 13.

SER-

SERMON IV.

Of the true guard *of innocence*; *and the natural* progreſs *of vice.*

MATT. xxvi. 35.

Peter *ſaid unto him, though I ſhould die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.*

THIS, which is recorded in the text, was certainly, in itſelf, a brave and noble reſolution; and if it had been as *firmly* adhered to, as it was *honeſtly* formed, the apoſtle's character, in this particular ſcene of his life, would have been tranſmitted down, with diſtinguiſhed *honour*, to all ſucceeding ages. But the *event* was, in reality, quite different; and affords a flagrant and melancholly proof of the *frailty*, and *inconſtancy*, of human nature. It ſhews it, indeed, to be ſo fickle and mutable, as that, ſometimes, there is but a very *ſhort* interval between *reſolving well*, and *doing ill*; and a quick ſurpriſing tranſition, from the moſt ſolemn profeſſions of *zeal*, and uncommon *ardour*, in the cauſe of virtue, to a direct and public *renunciation* of it. Every example of this ſort is a ſtanding leſſon of *humility*,

and *caution*, to the reſt of mankind: and the *moral cauſes* of it may, in moſt inſtances, be diſtinctly traced; and have the ſame *influence* in all times. So that we may conſider the text, as extending far beyond the *perſonal* character of St. *Peter*, and taking a much wider ſcope—And diſcourſe from it, 'as if the *depravity* 'and *diſhonour* of *human nature* was the *ſubject*; and *man*, as *man*, 'the *auditor*, to whom it is properly addreſſed.'

ST. PETER appears, from his whole hiſtory, to have been a perſon of a *lively* and *ſanguine* temper. We find him, upon many occaſions, profeſſing, with a peculiar *earneſtneſs* and *warmth*, his *affection* and inviolable *fidelity* to his maſter; and reſenting every thing, which, he apprehended, was *injurious* to him, or diſparaging to his *dignity*. He could, therefore, hardly bear to be told, even by *Chriſt* himſelf, that the *ſtrength* of his *zeal* would ever abate, and much leſs that he would *openly deny* his Lord; but, from the *forwardneſs*, and ſome degree of *preſumption*, that was natural to him, joined with the experience of an *honeſt uncorrupted* heart, he declared his reſolution as in the text (in which, he made no doubt, but he might confide) *to die with him*, rather than, through baſe fear and cowardice, to *betray* and *deſert* his cauſe.

AND the very ſame circumſtances, that account for the *vehemence* and *heat* of his reſolution, will likewiſe account, in a great meaſure, for his inglorious *fall*. For, *preſuming* too far, and having no *diſtruſt* of his own firmneſs and ſtability, it is highly probable, that he ſtood leſs upon his *guard*, and neglected to weigh, with that ſeriouſneſs and deliberation, which the importance of it deſerved, the ſeaſonable and friendly *admonition*, which his maſter had given him. And, thus, the temptation

aſſaulted

aſſaulted him, *over-powered* him, and robbed him of his beſt treaſure, his *innocence*, before he was duly *ſenſible*, though *fore-warned* of his danger—An error this, that all who are of the ſame *warm* and *ſanguine* diſpoſitions, are more peculiarly expoſed to, not only in caſes of *extraordinary* tryal, but in the *common* courſe of virtue, and of human life: 'Such being, generally, 'more haſty and eager to *reſolve*, than they are ſteady to *execute*; 'and being apt, withal, to entertain too high an opinion of them-'ſelves, and fail in the exerciſe of that conſtant vigilance and cir-'cumſpection, which are abſolutely neceſſary to maintain a life 'of religion, and ſtrict morality.'

But, to the account of St. *Peter*'s heinous *diſſimulation*, and *apoſtacy* from the truth, it is neceſſary, to do juſtice to his character, that we add what followed in conſequence of it, his *humiliation* and *repentance*; which were attended with all poſſible marks of *ſincerity*, and *ingenuity* of mind. For though he *fell*, and that fully and ſhamefully too, partly through his *preſumption*, and partly through the *ſudden conſternation*, by which he was oppreſſed, and diſpirited, and deprived of the aids and ſuccours of reaſon; yet the *integrity* of his heart, which was only *controuled*, in its uſual operation, by the preſent violence of the temptation, but had never totally *deſerted* him, *revived* upon the firſt ſerious reflection, and diſcovered its ſuperior influence. He *lamented* his error, and *corrected* it: His reformation was *complete* and *laſting*: He aſſerted the truth againſt its numerous and powerful oppoſers, *undaunted*, and *unmoved*, under the bittereſt reproaches and perſecutions; and ſacrificed, for the ſake of the glorious cauſe, which he had deliberately eſpouſed, *eaſe*, *liberty*, *and life*.—His inward goodneſs, now better *fortified*, and prepared for trials, ſhewed itſelf to be *invincible*; and he fulfilled the *reſolution*, which he had

had before violated, through an unexpected ſurprize and terror—The reſolution of even *dying for Chriſt*, rather than he would conſent to *deny him*. And there are ſeveral obſervations naturally ariſing from this hiſtory, that are of univerſal importance and uſe.

THE FIRST of which is this, that there are ſome *critical ſeaſons* of danger, that may at once, *overſet* a very ſincere and well eſtabliſhed virtue. Theſe are, generally, ſuch as come upon us by *ſurprize*, and, againſt which, we have not *armed* ourſelves with a ſufficient ſtock of *reſolution*. Thus St. *Peter*, though he had purpoſed in general never to deny *Chriſt*, yet, not having *impreſſed* it upon his mind with proper weight, and not *expecting* the temptation, by which he was encountered, his reſolution was not prepared to *exert* itſelf; and, of conſequence, he may juſtly be ſaid to have been *diſarmed*, and wholly *unprovided* for his own *defence*, when his integrity was brought to the *teſt*. The *maid-ſervant*, belonging to the *high prieſt*, charged him with being a diſciple of *Jeſus* of *Nazareth*, when his thoughts were wholly *intent* upon another ſubject. He apprehended himſelf to be in no danger, when his danger was *neareſt*; and, upon ſuch an unlooked for ſhock, *dread* and *terror* ſeized his ſpirits, and rendered him incapable of *recollection*, and of diſcovering a becoming *preſence* and *ſtrength* of mind. So that, his courage having forſaken him, and his thoughts being perplexed and confuſed, he firſt began to *prevaricate*, and, in an *evaſive* manner, to deny the accuſation; and, ſoon after, being charged again, he again denied, in more *direct* and *explicite* terms; and at laſt, his *fears*, and together with them, his *embaraſſment* and *guilt* increaſing, he proceeded ſo far, as to renounce all relation to *Chriſt*, and knowledge of him, with falſe *oaths* and profane *execrations*.

AND

AND *critical ſeaſons*, of a like nature with this, frequently happen in the courſe of human affairs, *viz. ſudden* and *unexpected* events that put our virtue to a very ſevere and dangerous *proof*, and call for the immediate exerciſe of a ſtrong unſhaken *reſolution* —And yet have a natural tendency to *alarm* the paſſions, and *diſſipate* reflexion.—Propoſals, perhaps, are made to us, before we are aware of the deſign, to advance ourſelves by *diſſimulation* and *injuſtice*; we are flattered with the proſpect of extraordinary *advantages*, to be obtained by methods, that are not ſtrictly honourable; advantages quite above our common views in life, and which we could not reaſonably hope for: Or elſe fair opportunities, and powerful incitements, to the gratification of ſome criminal paſſion (to which we are by conſtitution moſt inclined) *unexpectedly* preſent themſelves——And thus our virtue may be *oppreſſed*, and *borne down*, by the very ſame temptations, aſſaulting us in an *unguarded* hour, which, if they had been foreſeen, and maturely deliberated upon, our *integrity* might have enabled us to *repel*, with a generous ſcorn and indignation. In all which caſes, it is not ſo properly the *temptation* itſelf, as our being *attacked* by *ſurpriſe*, that ſubdues and enſlaves us.

AND ſuch hazardous ſcenes, as theſe, are very *fit* to be mixed with other more common trials, in a ſtate of moral *diſcipline*: Becauſe, they naturally excite *circumſpection*, teach *experience*, improve *reſolution*, and raiſe our virtue to an eminent degree of *ſtrength* and *ſublimity*. And, at the ſame time, that they are ſo beneficial in their *conſequences*, if we come off victorious, and preſerve our integrity inviolable, they plainly point out to us, what our duty is, and in what manner we ought to conduct ourſelves, if we would paſs through life with rectitude, and honour, and inward ſatisfaction. But this leads me

To ANOTHER remark, ſuggeſted by the hiſtory to which the text refers, and that is, that the beſt and ſureſt way, to maintain our innocence, is to keep the mind *calm* and *unruffled*, and *attentive* to all *events*. If we are poſſeſſed of a *ſedate* temper, we ſhall be able to determine with *propriety*, in all caſes that occur to us. If reaſon be clear and undiſturbed, we may always *ſee* our danger, and *avoid* it: we ſhall be furniſhed with ſufficient *motives* to inſpire ſteadineſs and equanimity, and animate our reſolution: we are, then, at liberty to *weigh* maturely every *propoſal* that is made to us, and may *ſhun* the fatal effects of a raſh and precipitate conduct. As long as we hold this rational and noble command of ourſelves, we have but little cauſe to fear being *ſurpriſed*, and violently *hurried*, into immoralities; and, conſequently, have guarded the *weak ſide* of human nature. And as for premeditated and determined wickedneſs, that has, almoſt always, its foundation in *indeliberate* and *heedleſs exceſſes*; which inflame the paſſions, gradually blind the underſtanding, aud ſtupify the natural conſcience of good and evil. And while the mind is unruffled, and continues to reflect cooly, it is ſcarce poſſible for it to conſider, but with deteſtation and horror, ſuch an *abandoned* ſtate of depravation and diſorder.

In like manner, if we are duly *attentive* to *all events*, that befal us, we ſhall probably be *prepared*, for all events. We ſhall form our temper and behaviour in that manner, which is beſt *adapted* to them. We ſhall examine into their probable conſequences, and *guard* againſt thoſe that are injurious. We ſhall take care not to be betrayed into any practices, that are inconſiſtent with integrity, by indeliberate exceſſes of *paſſion*, or an over-confident

confident *preſumption.* And our virtue will, by this means, be ſo *fortified* and *wiſely defended*, as to ſuſtain the moſt difficult and laborious conflicts, to which it may be expoſed; ſo as neither to be *ſpoted* and *defiled* by criminal compliances, nor *ſink* under the weight of oppreſſion.

WHEREAS, if we are diſturbed and diſordered by any intemperate paſſion, ſo as to have our reflexions *tumultuous* and *confuſed*, and to be hindered from *attending*, regularly and calmly, to our preſent ſituation, and the proper duties of it, we can neither have judgment to *direct*, nor reſolution to *act* with firmneſs and vigour; but, in all ſudden emergencies, ſhall be apt to follow the *firſt ſentiment*, that riſes within us; and be carried away, by the impulſe of that *particular paſſion*, which happens to have the aſcendent, of whatever kind it be: And, conſequently, we muſt be in imminent danger of deeply wounding our integrity, and forfeiting, perhaps intirely and irrecoverably, our peace and honour.

THIS, which has been diſtinctly ſtated, is, on both ſides, the probable *tendency* of things, according to the fixed *laws* of the human conſtitution. Perturbation, confuſion, and inattention of mind are the immediate ſources of *vice*—And calm reflexion, ſeaſonably and wiſely applyed to every event, that happens in the courſe of moral life; on what conduct is particularly ſuited to it and will inſpire inward reſolution to purſue it—this, I ſay, is the neceſſary, the only, and will, by the bleſſing of GOD, prove a ſure and effectual ſupport of rectitude of heart, and manners.

I BEG leave to add to all this, that it will be of great uſe to us ſeriouſly to conſider, how it would be proper for us to act, in all the *various ſtates* and *conditions* of human life; to imagine, frequently, a *change* in our circumſtances, to repreſent ourſelves, to our own thoughts, as attended by *temptations*, which may never actually befal us, and reduced to a *ſituation*, that ſeems at preſent remote, and at a great diſtance from us. For, by making the *virtues*, of *every ſtation*, intimate and familiar to our reflections, as well as the ſpecial inſtances of *vigilance* and *reſolution*, that are required in it, we are never likely to be confounded, or loſe our diſcretion and conſtancy, under the moſt ſudden *viciſſitudes* of this uncertain and variable ſcene of our exiſtence. We are never likely to be ſurprized, at being called to act *a new part*, with which we are altogether unacquainted; but ſhall have both the *rule* of our behaviour, and *motives* to adhere to it, direct and plain before us.

INDEED, the heat and effort of reſolution, which ſpring from *preſent paſſion*, and *accidental momentary fits* of zeal, are not, as is evident beyond diſpute from St. *Peter*'s caſe, a ſufficient *ſecurity* and *guard* of our innocence. Theſe may be *honeſt*, as his was, and ſpring from an inward ſenſe of *fitneſs*, *gratitude*, and *ingenuity*, but are not likely to be *permanent* and *durable*. For the *effects*, of a ſudden and high raiſed *tranſport*, ſeldom laſt longer, than the tranſport itſelf; and that which may be depended upon, as a *ſubſtantial defence* of our virtue, muſt be ſomething more deeply fixed, and rooted, in the heart. 'It muſt be a reſolution 'framed upon *comparing* all *circumſtances*, and *weighing* all *con-* '*ſequences*; a reſolution often *renewed*, and urged, with due *force*,

'and *efficacy*, upon the conſcience: In a word, a reſolution ren-
'dered ſo *habitual* to us, when the danger is *remote*, that it will
'not fail of *recollecting itſelf*; and *exerting* its utmoſt *influence*,
'when the ſame danger is directly *impending*.'

In the THIRD place, we may obſerve from the hiſtory now before us, the natural *progreſs* of ſin, from *one ſtage* to *another*, till it arrives at a ſcandalous *height* of *enormity*; and, that when a man has once ventured beyond the *limits* of innocence, he can have no ſecurity, that he ſhall *ſtop* at the *firſt* offence, but may be hurried on to ſuch wickedneſs, as, before, he would ſcarce allow himſelf to be *capable* of. St. *Peter*, we have ſeen, firſt began with *prevarication*, and with returning an *ambiguous* and *evaſive* anſwer, when he was charged with being one of *Chriſt*'s diſciples; and by *this*, it is highly probable, he hoped to have delivered himſelf from the *difficulty*, in which he was involved—And little did he imagine, that his impiety and guilt would have proceeded *ſo far*, as to a direct *denial* of his maſter, and to open *prophaneneſs* and *blaſphemy*. But thus it was in fact; and thus it has been, in innumerable other inſtances. *One act* of vice, *one indulgence* of irregular paſſion, has not only prepared the way to *another*, but led to the moſt *exceſſive* and *unnatural* wickedneſs. The examples are various, and the degrees of corruption various; but the *treacherous*, *inſlaving*, *infatuating* nature of ſin is delineated, in the ſtrongeſt colours, in them all.

The mind of man is, by *nature*, ſo ſtrongly *attached* to virtue, that it cannot become totally corrupted *all at once*. Some go on *faſter* in the paths of vice, than others. But the intire corruption of the mind is, for the moſt part, a work of *labour*, and *ſlow progreſſion*. Some *ſoftenings* muſt be uſed, to make vice appear

tolerable; ſome artful *colourings*, to diſguiſe, or hide, its native *odiouſneſs* and *deformity*: and it requires *time*, thoroughly to *ſilence* the voice of conſcience, and *ſuppreſs* all uneaſy reflexions.

THE caſe, therefore, generally ſtands thus—Men *begin* with repreſenting ſin, as a *weakneſs* and *infirmity* of nature, which a being of infinite goodneſs, who can have no motions of *revenge*, and whoſe only end in the government of the world is the *happineſs* of his creatures and ſubjects, will eaſily *pardon*, or, at leaſt, not *rigorouſly puniſh*. *Then* they ſet themſelves to invent *ſalvoes*, and *plauſible* circumſtances, to *mitigate* the guilt of their evil actions. And having, by this means, rendered vice more *familiar*, and leſſened that *averſion* and *horror*, which they *before* felt in their minds at the thought of it; having thus perverted and enſlaved their *judgment*, and broke through that powerful reſtraint, the *fear* of GOD's *diſpleaſure*; they will naturally proceed to *greater degrees* of licentiouſneſs. The *ſucceſs* of one vicious purſuit, or the *pleaſure* that has attended it, will diſpoſe them to *wiſh for*, and, conſequently, eaſily *incline* them to, a *repetition* of the offence, till they are *hardened* beyond all ſenſe of the evil of it: The *authority* of reaſon being weakned, and the *tyranny* of wild paſſion increaſed, by every irregular gratification.

ONE vice will frequently call for another, to *palliate* and *cover* it; to render the *gain* of it more certain; or prevent *interruption*, and *diſturbance*, in its falſe ſophiſticated pleaſures; or to *ſcreen* from the *evil conſequences*, that, it may be juſtly apprehended, will follow upon it. And when men become *habitually* devoted to the practice of wickedneſs, and have no *reliſh* of ſublimer exerciſes and enjoyments; eſpecially, if they have ſo far conquered *ſhame*, as to commit public and notorious impiety; it is no wonder,

der, if they *defend* it openly, and *ridicule* all attempts, to expoſe their vices, as the effect of ignorance and enthuſiaſm: it is no wonder, if having, for a long time, *deſerted* the paths of virtue, they ſee no *beauty* or *agreeableneſs* in them; or that being *enſlaved* to vice, they ſhould, for their own *eaſe*, endeavour to repreſent this fouleſt infamy and ſhame of human nature, under *falſe* and *deluſive* appearances.——This is the *natural progreſs* of a corrupted mind, from the *firſt*, and *ſmaller*, inſtances of its depravation, till, at length, by offering continual violence to reaſon, it is ſo ſtrangely blinded and ſtupified, as not to ſtick at the moſt deteſtable immoralities; and in the elegant language of the prophet, to *put darkneſs for light, and light for darkneſs; bitter for ſweet, and ſweet for bitter* *.

Thus it was with *David*. He *began* with wanton looks, and indulging to laſcivious deſires, and *ended* with adultery, and the ſhedding of innocent and loyal blood. And thus it was with *Hazael*, whoſe hiſtory is mentioned in the ſecond book of *Kings*, and his character *blotted* with treaſon, the murder of his prince, and other inhuman crimes. Had he been of an *humble* mind, not fond of *power*, and dazzled by the pomp of *greatneſs*; and had he poſſeſſed a *tender* and *ſympathiſing* heart, that was *ſenſible* of the diſtreſſes of his fellow-creatures, and *open* to the impreſſions of humanity; it is not at all likely, that he would have committed theſe execrable crimes. But having, as is highly probable, indulged *aſpiring thoughts*, and being a man of a *vaſt ſcope* of *ambition*, the *near proſpect*, of a *crown*, was a temptation almoſt *irreſiſtible*; like a ſtrong and glaring *light*, to a weak diſtempered *eye*, it confounded his *reaſon*, and led him to trample on *juſtice*,

* Iſa. v. 20.

fidelity,

fidelity, and *honour*. And when he had mounted the throne by *uſurpation*, and *blood* (by which he evidently demonſtrated, that he was of a *hard inflexible* diſpoſition, that had very *little feeling* of generoſity, and mercy) it is nothing ſtrange, to find him giving *a looſe* to *cruelty*, and endeavouring to ſupport himſelf, in his unlawful power, by a *vigorous* and *relentleſs oppreſſion*.

HERE we may ſee, engraven in legible characters, the *extravagant effects* of ungoverned paſſion, in one *ſingle* inſtance. It drew ſuch a black *train* of evils after it, as, being deſcribed to the *ſinner himſelf*, ſtruck him with *ſurpriſe* and *terror* *. Nor is this the caſe, only, with reſpect to *ambition*, but it holds true likewiſe as to *all other* irregular appetites: they lead thoſe, who are unhappily enſlaved to them, into an inextricable *labyrinth* of error and wickedneſs; and, frequently end in ſuch complicated and dreadful guilt, that, at the mention of it, even corrupt nature is *alarmed*, and *ſtarts back* with remorſe and abhorrence.

'AVOID therefore as a *peſtilential contagion*, as *poiſon* and 'death to the ſoul, all the alluring inſinuations of *vice*.' Take heed of placing an undue confidence even in your *virtues*; endeavour to infuſe, and plant deep within, the *ſeeds* of piety, and univerſal chriſtian goodneſs. Conſider, that the *ſame temptations*, nay, the very *ſame errors* and *vices*, may have a very different *effect*, as the prevailing inward *temper* is differently formed: 'That the fall of *Peter* made him *humble* and *penitent*; that 'of *Judas* rendered him *ſullen* and *deſperate*.' But, above all, let it be remembred, 'that the *ruin* of *ſouls*, like that of *ſtates*

* 2 Kings viii. 13.

'and

'and *empires*, often ſprings from *ſmall beginnings*; which ope-
'rate, in a great meaſure, *imperceptibly*, and ſeem, at firſt, to
'*threaten* nothing like ſuch a direful and moſt tremendous *con-*
'*ſequence*: and, in ſhort, that he who is hurried on, by unre-
'ſtrained exceſſes of paſſion, to the utmoſt *boundaries* of *right*;
'and like a man, that ſtands upon the *edge* of a *precipice*.—He
'may *look down*, perhaps, without danger; but the *firſt wrong*
'*ſtep*, after he has proceeded thus far, will *precipitate* him head-
'long into ſhame and miſery—from which, perhaps, he may
'never *riſe* again, ſo as to appear with *comfort*, and a *dignity* be-
'coming his nature, and his firſt appointed rank in the uni-
'verſe, among the *reaſonable* and *immortal* creatures of GOD.'

The End of the FIRST VOLUME.

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